ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A Spirited Tale of the Old-Time West

Tophet at Trail's End

by George Washington Ogden

10¢ PER COPY AUGUST 20 BY THE YEAR $4.00

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of Raymond Hi
holding an OM

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In Raymond Hitchc
hand **OMAR** is enti
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Omar Omar *is* **Aroma**
Aroma makes a cigarett
They've told you that
Smoke Omar for **Arom**

Thirteen kinds of choice
six kinds of selected Domesti
are blended to give Omar
and distinctive **Aroma.**

They always go together—
Ham and Eggs
Jack and Jill
Peaches and Cream
and
OMAR and AROMA.

Guaranteed by
The American Tobacco Company

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OMAR CIGARETTES yo
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Typewriter Company
wn ldg., Chicago, Ill.

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They've told you that
Smoke Omar for Arom

Thirteen kinds of choice
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Guaranteed by
The American Tobacco

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SAVE $36

A Finer Typewriter at a Fair Price

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FTER FREE TRIAL

vance. No deposit of any kind. No obligation to buy. ou need send. The Oliver comes to you at our risk for in your own home. Decide for yourself whether you t. If you don't want to keep the Oliver, simply send ense. If you do agree that it is the finest typewriter, , and want to keep it, take over a year to pay at the 4 a month.

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learned many les- it was unnecessary number of traveling y expensive branch to discontinue ous sales methods. buys the identical at $100.

Our Latest and Best Model

This is the finest and costliest Oliver we have ever built. It has all the latest improvements. It has a standard keyboard so that anyone may turn to it with ease.

Try this Oliver five days free and prove its merit to yourself.

Among the 900,000

Oliver purchasers are such distinguished concerns as:

Columbia Graphophone Co., National City Bank of N. Y., Boston Elevated Railway, Hart, Schaffner & Marx, U. S. Steel Corporation, New York Edison Co., American Bridge Co., Diamond Match Co., and others of great rank.

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upon. It brings you an Oliver for free d copy of our booklet "The High Cost eason and the Remedy."

anadian Price, $82

Typewriter Company
ewr ldg., Chicago, Ill.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER CO., 73B Oliver Typewriter Bldg. Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay $4 at the rate of $4 a month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is.....
This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

Occupation or Business.....

this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXVI — CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 20, 1921 — NUMBER 3

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THE popularity of "The Greatest Gamble," printed last winter, causes us to be happy over the fact that we are able to announce another romance from the same author, to begin next week.

DIANA THE HUNTED

BY ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

likewise has its scene laid in England, and is a story rife with love, cupidity, intrigue, and cross-purposes sure to keep your attention riveted to each succeeding page of the generous instalments we shall give you during the five weeks of its run.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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Foremen and Superintendents $1800 to $5000 Yearly

Learn to Fill Bigger Shoes

Engineers (all kinds) $2000 to $5000 Yearly

Office Manager or Auditor $1800 to $5000 Yearly

NO matter what kind of work you are doing now, a set of these great home study books will quickly fit you for a bigger and better paying job. We will send any set you select for one week's free examination, and if you want to keep them you pay only the special reduced price—at the rate of 75 cents a week. This is your opportunity to make more money—grasp it NOW. Use these books and a little spare time and LEARN TO FILL BIGGER SHOES.

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Five volumes, 2700 pages and 2000 illustrations. Prepares for Garage Foreman, Automobile Mechanic or Chauffeur. Invaluable to car owners. Regular price, $45.00. Special price, $24.80.

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DON'T SEND MONEY!

Write the name of the books you want on the coupon and mail it today. We will send the books at once, express collect, and you can use them just as if they were your own for a whole week. If you decide you don't want to keep them, send them back at our expense.

75 Cents a Week

If you like the books, as thousands of other men have after examination, just send us $2.80. You can send the balance of the special reduced price at the rate of $3.00 each month (75 cents a week).

Start right now and learn to fill bigger shoes. There will be a better job looking for you if you do. Be ready to meet it when it comes. *Send the coupon now.*

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. X-16-C, Chicago, Ill.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. X-16-C, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me set of..... for 7 days' examination, shipping charges collect. I will examine the books thoroughly and, if satisfied, will send $2.80 within 7 days and $3.00 each month until I have paid the special price of $.... If I decide not to keep the books, I will return them by express at your expense. Title not to pass to me until the set is fully paid for.

Name.....

Address.....

Reference.....

SEND THE COUPON NOW

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	
Minimum space four lines.		

Sept. 24th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close August 27th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WE WANT 50 GOOD MEN TO REPRESENT US in your territory taking orders for **Insyde Tyres** inner armor for automobile tires. Positively prevent punctures and blowouts. Guaranteed double tire mileage. Any tire. Biggest thing on the market. Work spare time or full time. $8 to $20 a day. Enormous demand. Low priced. Write for territory. American Accessories Co., B501, Cincinnati, Ohio.

SALES HUSTLERS WANTED. New Ford Auto Accessory. Patented U. S. and Canada. Sells instant demonstration. 200 per cent. profit. Carry in your pocket. Make $5 every sale. R. Green, 514 Van Buren, Chicago.

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month. Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days, $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y-141, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS, $60 TO $200 A WEEK. Free Samples. Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Anyone can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431H N. Clark St., Chicago.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted.** Earn $30 to $35 **Extra Every Week,** taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples **today.** The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. H-104, Chicago.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

DO NOT BE A WAGE EARNER ALL YOUR LIFE. There are many opportunities in the big West. Great corporations gathered in their enormous wealth by getting possession of natural resources of the country. The Government still has great stores of wealth that have never been tapped which may be had by simply filing on and carrying out certain provisions. No capital required. Description and Location of Natural Resources of Idaho will be mailed for Fifty Cents by the Pacific Publishing Company, Pocatello, Idaho.

MAKE $100 TO $300 A MONTH DURING YOUR SPARE TIME—right at home. The **Independence Spare-Time Business Plans** show how. They contain 137 practical, money-making ideas. Write at once. Send no money. We mail Plans for **free** inspection. If you keep and use them to start an independent, profitable business of your own, pay only $3. Otherwise, remail Plans any time within five days and you will owe nothing. American Business Builders, Dept. P, 1133 Broadway, New York.

YOU READ THESE LITTLE ADVERTISEMENTS. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read **your** message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe **your own services?** Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write **to-day** to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD HARDWOOD LANDS in Michigan, well located; 20, 40, 80 acre tracts, $15 to $30 per acre. Small payment down, balance long time. We help you. Send for **Free** book. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245, First Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SALESMEN: EARN $3,500 TO $10,000 A YEAR. City or Traveling. Experience unnecessary. Quickly qualify through our amazing system. Free Employment Service to Members. Send for Salesmanship book, list of lines and full particulars. Nat. Salesmen's Tr. Ass'n, Dept. 133-K, Chicago, Ill.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

CREW MANAGERS—AGENTS. OPALINE PAINTINGS ARE A KNOCKOUT. Make old territory new. Seasoned picture men double their sale. Beginners make $1.00 an hour and more with rigs. Greatest hit ever made. Samples and expense money furnished. Write today. Consolidated Portrait Co., Desk A-22, 1029 W. Adams St., Chicago.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS! HERE'S THE BIG MONEY GETTER. You give Pair Dressmakers Shears **free** with each sale of "Winning 7" at $1.50. Everybody buys. One hundred per cent profit. $10-$20 daily profit. Particulars Free. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

AGENTS: Water-Proof Kitchen Apron, Every housewife buys. Dainty, durable, economical, acid-proof, grease-proof. Sample free. Thomas Mfg. Co., Class 2107, Dayton, Ohio.

HELP WANTED

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. BE A DETECTIVE. Travel; Great demand everywhere. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and Short Stories for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T payment after securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—MALE

MEN WANTED FOR DETECTIVE WORK. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former U. S. Government Detective, 107 St. Louis, Mo.

EARN $250 A MONTH, EXPENSES PAID, as Railway Traffic Inspector. Local or traveling. Outdoors. Start at $110 monthly, position guaranteed after 3 months spare time study. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

$5 DOWN SECURES A BEAUTIFUL STYLISH FUR COAT on EASY PAYMENTS

The Most Sensational Offer of the Year!!

Of course, this offer appears almost too good to be true, but it is an **absolute fact!** You can have your choice of our wonderful, big, splendid stock of exquisite Fur Coats, and all you have to pay to get one is **$5 down. Think of it! Isn't it marvelous?**

Select any Fur Coat from Our Tremendous Stock!! We'll send it to You on Approval!!

No bother, no fuss! All you have to do is to **send the coupon** and we'll send the coat of your choice **on approval.** Isn't it easy?

Your Money Back if You are Not Satisfied in Every Way!!

Every coat we sell is **guaranteed as to price, quality** and is **exactly what we say it is.** You'll be more than satisfied. If not, **we'll return every penny that you send in!**

Buy Now!! Take Advantage of the Very Lowest Summer Prices!

Don't wait till winter—Furs are always higher priced then. Now is the time to take advantage of the lowest Summer prices that you could ever think of! **Send coupon now!**

You Have Always Wished for a Fur Coat, Haven't You? Here's Your Opportunity!!

No longer is it necessary for you to dream of having a luxurious, soft, comfy, warm Fur Coat for the cold blasts of winter time that will soon be with us. **Get yourself a stylish, snappy Colonial Fur Coat—$5 down and a little every now and then** is all that is needed! **Simply send the coupon** and we'll send the Coat to you **on approval** Look at the clever styles illustrated here!

Free Service!!

With every Fur Coat that we sell during this sensational $5 down offer, **we guarantee to keep it in free repair for one year.** Think what this alone means to you! Don't it appear to you that **we must know they are Fur Coats, the best to be had?**

References: American State Bank, Detroit, Mich., Dun's and Bradstreets Commercial Agency.

MAIL THIS NOW

Drawn from Life by Our Artist.

STYLE No. 106-A

Here is a magnificent Fur Coat in a stylish, popular design. Notice **the wide flare,** very **deep collar** and cuffs of **Squirrel.** Absolutely the **newest** of the **new** styles. The price is only $245. But you can secure it, **simply by paying $5 down** and the balance to suit yourself.

$5 Down

Look!! Look!!

$5 DOWN

Secures this Magnificent Fur Coat!

Don't put it off! Use the coupon now. Get yourself a Fur Coat Sent on approval.

Actual Drawing from Life

Style No. 107-A

Here is a 3-4 length Near-Seal or Sealine Coat and **our most popular model! Extra deep collar** and **cuffs** of **Black Marten** (Skunk), luxurious silk brocade lined, and the price is **only $185.** But you can get it by **simply paying $5 down** and the balance **in small weekly or monthly payments.**

Sent on approval if you use the coupon.

CUT OUT THIS COUPON AND MAIL IT NOW

COLONIAL CLOTHES SHOP

1260 GRISWOLD STREET, DETROIT, MICH.

Enclosed please find $5 for which you will kindly send to me on approval Fur Coat No. 107-A or 106-A. (Mark off the Coat that you do not want.) It is understood that I have the privilege of examination and that I will pay for this Coat in weekly payments. Also I send you $5 with the understanding that my money will be returned if I am not satisfied in every way.

My height is.....ft.....inches, and I weigh about.....lbs.

Name.....

Address.....

If you want to receive our illustrated catalog of Fur Coats put a check mark here [ ]

SAVE YOUR BODY

Conserve Your Health and Efficiency First

"I Would Not Part With It For $10,000"

So writes an enthusiastic, grateful customer. "Worth more than a farm" says another. In like manner testify over 100,000 people who have worn it.

The Natural Body Brace

Overcomes **WEAKNESS** and **ORGANIC AILMENTS** of **WOMEN** and **MEN.** Develops erect, graceful figure. Brings restful relief, comfort, ability to do things, health and strength.

Wear It 30 Days Free at Our Expense Does away with the strain and pain of standing and walking; replaces and supports misplaced internal organs; reduces enlarged abdomen; straightens and strengthens the back; corrects stooping shoulders; develops lungs chest and bust; relieves backache. curvatures, nervousness, ruptures, constipation, after effects of Flu. Comfortable and easy to wear. **KEEP YOURSELF FIT.** Write today for illustrated booklet, measurement blank, etc., and read our very liberal proposition.

HOWARD C. RASH, Pres. Natural Body Brace Co., 227 Rash Bldg., Salina, Kansas

For Boys and Girls Also

$5.00 a month

The 21-Jewel Burlington is sold to you at a very low price and on the very special terms (after free examination) of only $5.00 a month—no interest. You are under no obligation to buy! Send for full information. A letter or post card will do.

Burlington Watch Company, Dept. C-145
19th Street and Marshall Boulevard **Chicago, Illinois**

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Factory to Rider

Saves $15 to $25 on the model you select from **44 Styles,** colors and sizes of **Ranger** bicycles. Delivered free on approval, *express prepaid,* direct from the makers for **30 Days' Free Trial.** We pay return charges if not satisfactory.

12 Months to Pay Possession at once on our liberal year-to-pay plan. Any boy or girl can save the small monthly payments.

Tires wheels, chains, parts and equipment at half usual prices. **Big Ranger Catalog FREE** with marvelous new prices, 30 day trial offer and terms.

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY Dept. W 30, Chicago, Ill. Ask for Special Rider Agent plan-to earn money.

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Perrin Sold $250 One Day

Meisner, $250 one day; Shook, $311 one day Sept. 1920. Erwin's boy (going to school) makes $35 every Sat. afternoon. Erwin says $6 yields $25. No theory! No guesswork! Actual proven record of successes. Send for booklet.

Long Eakins Co. **811 High St., Springfield, Ohio**

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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AMBITIOUS WRITERS—SEND TODAY FOR FREE COPY AMERICA'S LEADING MAGAZINE for writers of Photoplays, Stories, Poems, Songs. Instructive, helpful. Writer's Digest, 601 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

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PHOTOPLAYS WANTED. Big prices paid. You can write them. We show you how. Experience unnecessary. Easy, fascinating way to earn money in spare time. Get free details. Rex Publisher, Box 175, M-29, Chicago.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

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BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for Civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalogue. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

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STAMPS FREE! 60 all different for the names of two collectors and 2c postage! 30 Sweden stamps 10c; 20 Denmark stamps 10c. Central Europe war money 5c. Toledo Stamp Co., Dept. A, Toledo, Ohio, U. S. A.

SONG POEMS WANTED

YOU WRITE WORDS FOR A SONG—We write the music, publish and secure a copyright. Submit poems on any subject. The Metropolitan Studios, 914 S. Michigan Avenue, Dept. 273, Chicago, Ill.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We will compose the music, secure copyright, and print. Submit poems on any subject. Seton Music Company, 920 S. Michigan Ave., Room 190, Chicago.

WRITE A SONG POEM. You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, or any subject, and send words today. I compose music and guarantee publication. Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG—We write music, copyright and endeavor to promote popularity and outright sale. Bell Studios, 1490 Broadway, Dept. 723, New York.

Write the Words for a Song. We compose music and guarantee to secure publication on a royalty basis by a New York music publisher. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Composing Studios, 238 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

TO MAKE FREE TEST

Liznite Gems are man created diamonds, brilliant, sparkling, fiery, perfectly cut, and pass easily for a $300 diamond. Select the ring you like best and give it every diamond test at our risk.

MOUNTINGS SOLID GOLD—GEMS FULL CARAT WEIGHT
No. 1, $18.50 No. 2, $16.50 No. 3, $15.50 No. 4, $15.50 No. 5, $12.50

FREE TEST Name, address, finger size, brings ring. Deposit $4.50 with your mailman when he gives you the ring. Then test a Liznite 10 days. If you return the ring within that time, back comes your deposit at once. But you may keep this wonderful ring that smashes all pre-war prices by paying balance $3 monthly or only 10c a day. SEND NOW.

Dept. 838-B **THE LIZNITE GEM COMPANY**
"House of Quality and Price" 128 N. Wells St., Chicago

Learn Auto

and TRACTOR BUSINESS
Earn $150 to $400 a Month

Thousands have learned here in 6 to 8 weeks and are making big money as repair men, drivers, and superintendents. Many own garages making $500 per month. **Big Book Free.**

RAHE SCHOOL, Dept. 2055
Kansas City, Mo. Cincinnati, O. Chicago, Ill.

Action! Fun! Novelty! Pep!

That's what you find in the stories of real human interest in the oldest and best of the ALL-FICTION Magazines

The
Argosy-Allstory Weekly

Tales of Love-Daring-Humor

Buy the current issue at any news-stand for Ten Cents and be convinced!

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
280 Broadway, New York City
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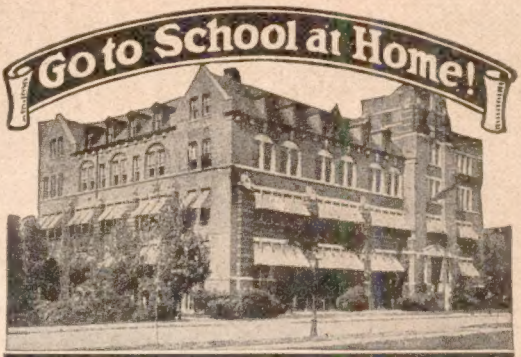

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXVI SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 1921 NUMBER 3

Tophet at Trail's End*

Part I

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "Steamboat Gold," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE UNCONQUERED LAND.

BONES! Bones of dead buffalo, bones of dead horses, bones of dead men: the tribute exacted by the Kansas prairie. A waste of bones, a sepulcher that did not hide its bones, but spread them, exulting in its treasures, to bleach and crumble under the stern sun upon its sterile wastes. Bones of deserted houses, skeletons of men's hopes sketched in the dimming furrows which the grasses were reclaiming for their own.

A land of desolation and defeat it seemed to the traveler indeed, as he followed the old trail along which the commerce of the illimitable West once was borne. Although that highway had belonged to another generation, and years had passed since an ox train toiled over it on its creeping journey toward distant Santa Fé, the ruts of old wheels were deep in the soil, healed over by the sod again, it is true, but seamed like scars in a veteran's cheek. One could not go astray on that broad highway, for the eye could follow the many parallel trails, where new ones had been broken when the old ones wore deep and rutted.

Present day traffic had broken a new trail between the old ones; it wound a dusty gray line through the early summer green of the prairie grass, endless, it seemed, to the eyes of the leg-weary traveler who bent his footsteps along it that sunny morning. This passenger, afoot on a road where it was almost an offense to travel by such lowly means, was a man of thirty or thereabout, tall and rather angular, who took the road in long strides much faster than the freighters' trains had traveled it in the days of his father. He carried a black, dingy leather bag swinging from his arm, a lean and unpromising repository, upon which the dust of the road lay spread.

Despite the numerous wheel-tracks, all

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of them apparently fresh, there was little traffic abroad. Not a wagon had passed him since morning, not a lift had been given him for a single mile. Now, mounting a ridge toward which he had been pressing forward the past hour, which had appeared a hill of consequence in the distance, but now flattened out to nothing more than a small local divide, he put down his bag, flung his dusty black hat beside it, and stood wiping his face with a large turkey-red handkerchief which he unknotted from about his neck.

His face was of that rugged type common among the pioneers of the West, lean and harsh-featured, yet nobly austere, the guarantee of a soul above corruption and small trickery, of a nature that endures patiently, of an anger slow to move. There were bright hues as of glistening metal in his close-cut light hair as he stood bareheaded in the sun.

Sheep sorrel was blooming by the wheel tracks of the road, purple and yellow; daisy-like flowers, with pale yellow petals and great wondering hearts like frightened eyes, grew low among the short grass; countless strange blooms spread on the prairie green, cheering for their brief day the stern face of a land that had broken the hearts of men in its cruelty and driven them away from its fair promises. The traveler sighed, unable to understand it.

All day he had been passing little sod houses whose walls were crumbling, whose roofs had fallen in, whose doors beckoned in the wind a sad invitation to come in and behold the desolation that lay within. Even here, close by the road, ran the grass-grown furrows of an abandoned field, the settler's dwelling-place unmarked by sod or stone. What tragedy was written in those wavering lines, what heartbreak of going away from some dear hope and broken dream! Here a teamster was cutting across the prairie to strike the road a little below the point where the traveler stood. Extra sideboards were on his wagon-box, as they used to put them on in corn-gathering time back in the traveler's boyhood home in Indiana. The wagon was heaped high with white, dry bones.

Bones. Nothing left to haul out of that land but bones. The young man took up his valise and hat and struck off down the road to intercept the freighter of this prairie product, hoping for an invitation to ride, better pleased by the prospect of resting living bones on dead dry ones than racking them in that strain to reach the town on the railroad, his journey's end, on foot before nightfall.

The driver's hat was white, like his bones; it drooped in weatherbeaten limpness about his ears, hiding his face, but he appeared to have a hospitable heart in spite of the cheerlessness of his pursuit. Coming to the road a little before the traveler reached the point of conjunction, he drew his team to a stand awaiting his approach.

"Have a ride?" he invited, edging over on the backless spring seat as he spoke, making room.

The bone-wagon driver was a hollow-framed man, who looked as if he had starved with the country, but endured past all bounds of hardship and discouragement. He looked hungry, hungry for food, hungry for change, hungry for the words of men. His long gray mustache hung far below his stubble-covered chin. He sat dispiritedly on his broken seat, sagging forward with forearms across his thighs.

"Footin' it over to Ascalon?" he asked, as the traveler mounted beside him.

"Yes, sir, I'm headin' that way."

"Come fur?"

"Well, yes," thoughtfully, as if he considered what might be counted far in that land of unobstructed horizons, "I have come a considerable little stretch."

"I thought maybe you was one of them new settlers in here, goin' over to Ascalon to ketch the train," the bone man ventured, putting his inquiry for further particulars as politely as he knew how.

"I'm not a settler yet, but I expect to try it here."

"You don't tell me?"

"Yes, sir; that's my intention."

"Where you from?"

"Iowa."

The bone man looked his passenger over with interest, from his feet in their serviceable shoes, to his head under his round-crowned, broad-brimmed black hat.

"A good many of 'em used to come in here from Ioway and Newbrasky in the early days," he said. "You never walked plumb from there, did you?"

"I thought of stopping at Buffalo Creek, back fifteen or twenty miles, but I didn't like the country around there. They told me it was better at Ascalon, so I just struck out to walk across the loop of the railroad and take a close look at the land as I went along."

"You must be something of a walker," the bone man marveled.

"I used to follow a walking cultivator across an eighty-acre cornfield," the traveler replied.

"Yes, that 'll stretch a feller's legs," the bone man admitted, reminiscently. "Nothing like follerin' a plow to give a man legs and wind. But they don't mostly walk around in this country; they kind of suspicion a man when they see him hoofin' it in here."

"There doesn't seem to be many of them either to walk or ride," the traveler commented, sweeping a look around the empty land.

"It used to be full of homesteaders all through this country—I seen 'em come and I seen 'em go."

"I've seen traces of them all along the railroad for the last hundred miles or more. It must have been a mighty exodus, a sad thing to see."

"Accordin' to the way you look at it, I reckon," the bone man commented. "They're comin' to this country agin, flocks of 'em. This makes the third time they've tried to break this part of Kansas to ride, and I don't know, on my soul, whether they'll ever do it or not. Maybe I'll have more bones to pick up in a year or two."

"It seems to be one big boneyard; I saw cars of bones on every sidetrack as I came through."

"Yes, I tell folks that come here and try to farm that bones was the best crop this country ever raised, and it 'll be about the only one. I come in here with the railroad, I used to drive a team pickin' up the buffaloes the contractors' meat-hunter killed."

"You know the history of its ups and downs, then," the young man remarked with every evidence of deep interest.

"I guess I do, as well as any man. Bones was the first freight the railroad hauled out of here, and bones 'll be the last. I follered the railroad camps after they built out of the buffalo country and didn't need me any more, pickin' up the bones. Then the settlers begun to come in, drawed on by the stuff them railroad colonization agents used to put in the papers back East. The country broke their backs and drove 'em out after four or five years. Then I follered around after *them* and picked up the bones.

"Yes, there used to be some familiar lookin' bones among 'em once in a while in them times. I used to bury that kind. A few of them settlers stuck, the ones that had money to put in cattle and let 'em increase on the range. They've done well—you'll see their ranches all along the Arkansaw when you travel down that way. This is a cattle country, son; that's what the Almighty made it for. It never can be anything else."

"And there was another wave of immigration, you say, after that?" the passenger asked, after sitting a while in silence turning over what the old pioneer had said.

"Yes, wave is about right. They come in by the freight-train load, cars of horses and cattle, and machinery for farmin', from back there in Ohio and Indiana and Ellinoi—all over that country where things a man plants in the ground grows up and comes to something. They went into this pe-rairie and started a bustin' it up like the ones ahead of 'em did. Shucks! You can turn a ribbon of this blame sod a hundred miles long and never break it. What can a farmer do with land that holds together that way? Nothin'. But them fellers planted corn in them strips of sod, raised a few nubbins, some of 'em, some didn't raise even fodder. It run along that way a few years, hot winds cookin' their crops when they did git the ground softened up so stuff would begin to make roots and grow, cattle and horses dyin' off in the winter and burnin' up in the fires them fool fellers didn't know how to stop when they got started in this grass. They thinned out year after year,

and I drove around over the country and picked up their bones.

"That crowd of settlers is about all gone now, only one here and there along some crick. Bones is gittin' scarce, too. I used to make more when I got four dollars a ton for 'em than I do now when they pay me ten. Grind 'em up to put on them farms back in the East, they tell me. Takin' the bones of famine from one place to put on fat in another. Funny, ain't it?"

The traveler said it was strange indeed, but that it was the way of nature for the upstanding to flourish on the remains of the fallen. The bone man nodded, and allowed that it was so, world without end, according to his own observations in the scale of living things from grassblade to mankind.

"How are they coming in now—by the trainload?" the traveler asked, reverting to the influx of settlers.

"These seem to be a different class of men," the bone man replied, his perplexity plain in his face. "I don't make 'em out as easy as I did the ones ahead of 'em. These fellers generally come alone, scoutin' around to see the lay of the country—I run into 'em right along drivin' livery rigs, see 'em around for a couple or three weeks sometimes. Then they go away, and the first thing I know they're back with their immigrant car full of stuff, haulin' out to some place somebody went broke on back in the early days. They seem to be a calculatin' kind, but no man ain't deep anough to slip up on the blind side of this country and grab it by the mane the way them fellers seems to think they're doin'. It 'll throw 'em, and it 'll throw 'em hard."

"It looks to me like it would be a good country for wheat," the traveler suggested.

"Wheat!"

The bone man pulled up on his horses, checking them as if he would stop and let this dangerous fellow off. He looked at the traveler with incredulous stare, into which a shading of pity came, drawing his naturally long face longer. "I'd just as well stop and let you start back right now, mister." He tightened up a little more on the lines.

There was merriment in the stranger's gray eyes, a smile on his homely face that softened the hard lines of it.

"Has nobody ever tried it?" he inquired.

"There's been plenty of fools here, but none that wild that I ever heard of," the bone man answered. "You're a hundred miles and more past the dead line for wheat—you'd just as well try to raise bananers here. Wheat! It'd freeze out in the winter and blow out by the roots in the spring if any of it got through."

The traveler swept a long look around the country, illusive, it seemed, according to its past treatment of men, in its restful beauty and secure feeling of peace. He was silent so long that the bone man looked at him again keenly, measuring him up and down as he would some monstrosity seen for the first time.

"Maybe you're right," the young man said at last.

The bone man grunted, with an inflection of superiority, and drove on, meditating the mental perversions of his kind.

"Over in Ascalon," he said, breaking silence by and by, "there's a feller by the name of Thayer—Judge Thayer, they call him, but he ain't never been a judge of nothin' since I've knowed him—lawyer and land agent for the railroad. He brings a lot of people in here and sells 'em railroad land. He says wheat 'll grow in this country, tells them settlers that to fetch 'em here. You two ought to git together—you'd sure make a pair to draw to."

"Wouldn't we?" assented the stranger, in hearty humor.

"What business did you foller back there in Ioway?" the bone man asked, not much respect in him now for the man he had lifted out of the road.

"I was a professional optimist," the traveler replied, grave enough for all save his eyes.

The bone man thought it over a spell. "Well, I don't think you'll do much in Ascalon," he said. "People don't wear specs out here in this country much. Anybody that wants 'em goes to the feller that runs the jewelry store."

The stranger attempted no correction, but sat whistling a merry tune as he looked over the country. The bone man drove on

in silence until they rose a swell that brought the town of Ascalon into view, a passenger-train just pulling in to the station.

"Octomist! Wheat!" ejaculated the bone man, with discount on the words that left them so poor and worthless they would not have passed in the meanest exchange in the world.

CHAPTER II.

THE WICKEDEST PLACE.

THERE was one tree in the city of Ascalon, the catalpa in front of Judge Thayer's office. This blazing noonday it threw a shadow as big as an umbrella, or big enough so that the judge, standing close by the trunk and holding himself up soldierly, was all in the shade but the gentle swell of his abdomen, over which his unbuttoned vest gaped to invite the breeze.

Judge Thayer was far too big for the tree, as he was too big for Ascalon, but, scholar and gentleman that he was, he made the most of both of them and accepted what they had to offer with grateful heart. Now he stood, his bearded face streaming sweat, his alpaca coat across his arm, his straw hat in his hand, his bald head red from the parboiling of that intense summer day, watching a band of Texas drovers who had just arrived with three or four thousand cattle over the long trail from the south.

These lank, wide-horned creatures were thronging and lowing around the water-troughs in the loading pens, the herdsmen shouting their monotonous, melancholy urgings as they crowded more famished beasts into the enclosures. Judge Thayer regarded the dusty scene with troubled face.

"And no pitch hotter!" said he, shaking his head in the manner of a man who sees complications ahead of him. He stood fanning himself with his hat, his brows drawn in concentration. "Twenty wild devils from the Nueces, four months on the trail, and this little patch of Hades at the end!"

The judge entered his office with that uneasy reflection, leaving the door standing open behind him, ran up his window shades, for the sun had turned from the front of his building, took off his collar and settled down to work. One could see him from the station platform, substantial, rather aristocratic, sitting at his desk, his gray beard trimmed to a nicety, one polished shoe visible in line with the door.

Judge Thayer's office was a bit removed from the activities of Ascalon, which were mainly profane activities, to be sure, and not fit company for a gentleman even in the daylight hours. It was a snubby little building with square front, "Real Estate" painted its width above the door. On one window, in crude black lettering:

WILLIAM THAYER
Attorney
Notary

On the other:

MAYOR'S OFFICE

The structure stood not above two hundred feet from the railroad station, at the end of Main Street, where the buildings blended out into the prairie, unfenced, unprofaned by spade or plow. Beyond Judge Thayer were a coal yard and a livery barn; behind him the lots which he had charted off for sale, marked by white stakes.

Ascalon, in those early days of its history, was not very large in either the territory covered or the inhabitants numbered; but it was a town of national notoriety in spite of its size. People who did not live there believed it to be an exceedingly wicked place, and the farther one traveled from Ascalon, in any direction whatever, the faster this ill fame increased. It was said, no farther off than Kansas City, that Ascalon was the wickedest place in the United States. So, one can imagine what character the town had in St. Louis, and guess at the extent of its notoriety in Pittsburgh and Buffalo.

Pullman porters had a holy fear of the

town. They announced the train's approach to it with suppressed breath, eyes rolling white in fear that some citizen of the proscribed spot might overhear and defend the reputation of his abiding-place in the one swift and incontrovertible argument then in vogue in that part of the world. Passengers of adventurous nature flocked to the station platform during the brief pause the trains made at Ascalon, prickling with admiration of their own temerity, so they might return home and tell of having set foot in the wickedest town in the world.

And that was the fame of Ascalon, new and raw, for the greater part of it, as it lay beside the railroad on that hot afternoon when Judge Thayer stood in the shade of his little catalpa bush watching the Texans drive their cattle into the loading pens.

Before the railroad reached out across the Great Plains, Ascalon was there as a fort, under another name. The railroad brought new consequence, new activities, and made it the most important loading-place for Texas cattle, driven over the long route on their slow way to market.

It was a cattle town, living and fattening on the herds which grazed the vast prairie lands surrounding it, and on the countless thousands which came northward to its portal over the Chisholm Trail. As will have been gathered from the scene already passed, agriculture had tried and failed in that land. Ascalon was believed to be, in truth, far beyond the limit of that gentle art, which was despised and contemned by the men who roamed their herds over the free grasslands, and the gamesters who flourished at their expense.

Not that all in Ascalon were vicious and beyond the statutory and moral law. There was a submerged desire for respectability in the grain of even the worst of them which came to the front at times, as when, in defense of the town's reputation, on election day they put in such a man as Judge Thayer for mayor. But the judge, in reality, was only a pillar set up for dignity and show. They elected him mayor, and went on running the town to suit themselves, for the city marshal was also an elective officer, and in his hands the scroll of the law reposed.

Now, in these summer days, there was a vacancy in this most important office, three months after election. The term had almost two years to run, the appointment of a man to the vacancy being in the mayor's hands. As a consequence there was being exerted a great deal of secret and open pressure on the latter in favor of certain favorites. It was from a conference with several of the town's financial powers that the mayor had returned to his office when you first beheld him under his catalpa tree. The sweat on his face was due as much to internal perplexity as outward heat, for Judge Thayer was a man who wanted to please his friends, and everybody that counted in town was his friend, although they were not all friends among themselves.

No later than the evening before, the vacancy in the marshalship had fallen; it would not do to allow the town to go unbridled for even another night. A strong man must be appointed to the place, and no fewer than three candidates were being urged by as many factions, each of which wanted its peculiar interests especially favored and protected. So Judge Thayer was in a sweat with good reason. He wished in his honest soul that he could reach out and pick up a disinterested man somewhere, set him into the office without the strings of fear or favor on him, and tell him to keep everybody within the deadline, regardless of whose business prospered most.

But there were not men raining down every day around Ascalon competent to fill the post of city marshal. Out of the material offered there was not the making of one side of a man. Two of them were creatures of the opposing gambling factions, the other a weak-kneed fellow with the pale eyes of a coward, put forward by the conservative business men who deplored much shooting in the name of the law.

How they were to get on without much shooting Judge Thayer did not understand. Not a bit of it. What he wanted was a man who would do more shooting than ever had been done before, a man who would clean the place of the too-ready gun-slingers who had gathered there, making the town's notoriety their capital, invading even the respectable districts in their night-

ly debaucheries to such insolent boldness that a man's wife or daughter dared not show her ear on the street after nightfall.

Judge Thayer put the town's troubles from him with a sigh and leaned to his work. He was preparing a defense for a cattle thief whom he knew to be guilty, but whose case he had undertaken on account of his wife and several small children living in a tent behind the principal gambling-house. Because it seemed a hopeless case from the jump, Judge Thayer had set his beard firmer in the direction of the fight. Hopeless cases were the kind that had come most frequently his way all the days of his life. He had been fronting for the under pup so long that his own chances had dwindled down to a distant point in his gray-headed years. But there was a lot of satisfaction behind him to contemplate, even though there might not be a great deal of prosperity ahead. That helped a man wonderfully when it came to casting up accounts. So he was bent to the cattle thief's case when a man appeared in his door.

This was a tall, bony individual with the dust of the long trail on him; a sour-faced man of thin visage, with long and melancholy nose, a lowering frown in his unfriendly, small red eyes. A large red mustache drooped over his mouth, the brim of his sombrero was pressed back against the crown as if he had arrived devil-come-headlong against a heavy wind.

Judge Thayer took him for a cattleman seeking legal counsel, and invited him in. The visitor shifted the chafed gear that bore his weapon, as if to ease it around his gaunt waist, and entered, removing his hat at the door. He stood a little while looking down at Judge Thayer, a disturbance in his weathered face that might have been read for a smile, a half mocking, half humorous expression that twitched his big mustache with a cat-like sneer.

"You're the mayor of this man's town, are you, judge?" he asked.

As the visitor spoke, Judge Thayer's face cleared of the perplexity that had clouded it. He got up, beaming welcome, offering his hand.

"Seth Craddock, as sure as little apples! I knew you, and I didn't know you, you old scoundrel! Where have you been all these years?"

Seth Craddock only expanded his facial twitching at this friendly assault until it became a definite grin.

"I've been ridin' the long trail," said Seth.

"With that bunch that just arrived?"

"Yeh. Drove up from the Nueces. I'm quittin'."

"The last time I saw you, Seth, you were butchering two tons of buffalo a day for the railroaders. I often wondered where you went after you finished your meat contract."

"I scouted a while for the gover'ment, but we run out of Indians. Then I went to Texas and rode with the Rangers a year or two."

"I guess you kept your gun-barrel hot down in that country, Seth?"

"Yeh. Once in a while it was lively. Dyin' out down there now, quiet as a school."

"So you turned back to Kansas lookin' for high life. Heard of this burg, I guess?"

"I kind of thought something might be happenin' off up here, judge."

"And I was sitting here frying out my soul for the sight of a full-size man when you stepped in the door! Sit down; let's you and me have a talk."

Seth drew a dusty chair from against the wall and arranged himself in the draft between the front and back doors of the little house. He leaned his storm-beaten sombrero against the leg of his chair near his heel, as carefully as if making preparations for quick action in a hostile country, shook his head when the judge offered a cigar, shifted his worn cartridge belt a bit with a movement that appeared to be as unconscious as unnecessary.

"What's restin' so heavy on your mind, judge?" he inquired.

"Our city marshal stepped in the way of a fool feller's bullet last night, and all the valuable property in this town is lyin' open and unguarded to-day."

"Don't nobody want the job?"

"Many are called, or seem to feel themselves nominated, but none is appointed. The appointment is in my hands; the job's

yours if you'll do an old friend a favor and take it. It pays a hundred dollars a month."

Seth's heavy black hair lay in disorder on his high, sharp forehead, sweated in little ropes, more than half concealing his immense ears. He smoothed it back now with slow hand, holding a thoughtful silence; shifted his feet, crossed his legs, looked out through the open door into the dusty street.

"How does the land lay?" he asked at length.

"You know the name of the town, everybody knows the name of the town. Well, Seth, it's worse than its name. It's a job; it's a double man's job. If it was any less I wouldn't lay it down before you."

"Crooks run things, heh?"

"The marshal we had wasn't worth the powder that killed him. Oh-h, he did kill off a few of 'em, but what we need here is a man that can see both sides of the street and behind him at the same time."

"How many folks have you got in this man's town by now, judge?"

"Between six and seven hundred. And we could double it in three months if we could clean things up and make it safe."

"How would you do it, judge? Marry everybody?"

"I mean we'd bring settlers in here and put 'em on the land. The railroad company could shoot farmers in here by the hundreds every month if it wasn't for the hard name this town's got all over the country. A good many chance it and come as it is. We could make this town the supply point for a big territory, we could build up a business that 'd make us as respectable as we're open and notorious now. For I tell you, Seth, this country around here is God Almighty's granary — it's the wheat belt of the world."

Seth made no reply. He slued himself a little to sweep the country over beyond the railroad station with his sullen red eyes. The heat was wavering up from the treeless, shrubless expanse, the white sun was over it as hot as a furnace blast. From the cattle pens the hoarse cries of the cowboys sounded, "Ho, ho, ho!" in what seemed derision of the judge's fervent claims.

"A lot of us have staked our all on the outcome here in Ascalon, we fellows who were here before the town turned out to be the sink-hole of perdition that it is to-day. We built our homes here, and brought our families out, and we can't afford to abandon it to these crooks and gamblers and gun-slingers from the four corners of the earth. I let them put me in for mayor, but I haven't got any more power than a stray dog. This chance to put in a marshal is the first one I've had to land them a kick in the gizzards, and by Jeems River, Seth, I want to double 'em up!"

"It looks like your trick, judge."

"Yes, if I had the marshal with me the two of us could run this town the way it ought to be run. We could fix it so we'd keep the county-seat here as sure as sundown."

"Considerin' a change?"

"The folks over in Glenmore are—the question will come to a vote this fall. The county-seat belongs here, not away off there at Glenmore, seven miles from the railroad."

"What's your chance?"

"Not very heavy right now. We can outvote them in town, but the country's with Glenmore, all on account of our notorious name. Folks hate to come in here to court, it's got so bad. But we could do a lot of cleaning up between now and November, Seth."

Seth considered it in silence, his red eyes on the dusty activities of his late comrades at the cattle pens. He shifted his dusty feet as if dancing to his slow thoughts, scraping his boot soles grittily on the floor.

"Yes, I reckon we could, judge."

"Half the people in Glenmore want to come over to the railroad. They'd vote with us if they could be made to feel this was a town to bring their families to."

Seth seemed to take this information like a pill under his tongue and dissolve it in his reflective way. Judge Thayer left him to his ruminations, apparently knowing his habits. After a little Seth reached for his hat in the manner of a man about to depart.

"All right, judge; we'll clean up the town and part its hair down the middle," he said.

Judge Thayer did not give vent to his elation on Seth Craddock's acceptance of the office of city marshal, although his satisfaction gleamed from his eyes and radiated from his kindly face. He merely shook hands with his new officer in the way of men sealing a bargain, swore him in, and gave him the large shield which had been worn by the many predecessors of the meat hunter in that uncomfortable office, three of whom had gone out of the world with lead enough in them to keep them from tossing in their graves.

This ceremony ended, Seth put his hat firmly on his small, reptilian head, adding greatly to the ferociousness of his thirsty countenance by his way of pulling the sombrero down upon his ears.

"Want to walk around with me through the town and introduce me and show me off?" he asked.

"It 'll be the biggest satisfaction in ten years!" Judge Thayer declared.

CHAPTER III.

FIRST BLOOD.

JUDGE THAYER had completed the round of Ascalon's business section with the town's new peace officer, introducing him in due form. They stood now in front of the hotel, the plank awning of which extended over the sidewalk breaking the sun, Judge Thayer about to go his way.

"We've got to change this condition of things, Seth," he said, sweeping his hand around the quiet square, where nothing seemed awake but a few loafers along the shady fronts: "we've got to make it a day town instead of a night roost for the buzzards that wake up after sundown."

Seth did not answer. He stood turning his red eyes up and down the street, as if calculating distances and advantages for future emergencies. And as he looked, there came driving into the somnolent square two men on a wagonload of bones.

"Old Joe Lynch—he's loadin' another car of bones," Judge Thayer said.

"He used to pick up meat for me," Seth remarked in his sententious way, neither surprised nor pleased on finding an associate of his adventurous days here in this place of his new beginning.

Joe Lynch drove across the farther side of the square, a block away from the two officials of Ascalon. There he stopped only long enough to allow his passenger to alight, and continued on to the railroad siding where his car stood.

Judge Thayer lingered under the hotel awning, where the breeze struck refreshingly, perhaps making a pretense of being cooled that was greater than his necessity, curious to see who it was Lynch had brought to town on his melancholy load. The passenger, carrying his flat bag, came on toward the hotel.

"He's a stranger to me," said the judge. His interest ending there, he went his way to take up again the preparation of his case in defense of the cattle thief whom he knew to be a thief, and nothing but a thief.

Seth Craddock, the new marshal, glanced sharply at the new arrival as he approached the hotel. It was nothing more severe than Seth's ordinary scrutiny, but it appeared to the traveler to be at once hostile and inhospitable, the look of a man who sneered out of his heart and carried a challenge in his eyes. The stranger made the mental observation that this citizen was a sour-looking customer, who apparently resented the coming of one more to the mills of Ascalon's obscene gods.

There was a cluster of flies on the open page of the hotel register, where somebody had put down a sticky piece of chocolate candy and left it. This choice confection covered three or four lines immediately below the last arrival's name, its little trickling rivulets, which the flies were licking up, spreading like a spider's legs. There was nobody in the office to receive the traveler's application for quarters, but evidence of somebody in the remote parts of the house, whence came the sound of a voice more penetrating than musical, raised in song:

> "With her apurn pinned *round* her,
> He took her *for* a swan,
> But O and a-las, it was *poor* Pol-ly Bawn."

So she sang, the words of the ancient ballad cutting through the partition like a

saw. There was a nasal quality in them, as if the singer were moved to tears by the pathos of poor Polly's end. The traveler laid a finger on the little bell that stood on the cigar case, sending his alarm through the house.

The song ceased, the blue door with "Dining-Room" in pink across its panels, shut against the flies, opened with sudden jerk, as if by a petulant hand. There appeared one who might have been Polly Bawn herself, judged by the white apron that shrouded her figure from shoulders to floor. She stood a moment in the doorway, seeing that it was a stranger, half closing that gay portal to step behind it and give her hair that swift little adjustment which, with women the world over, is the most essential part of the toilet. She appeared smiling then, somewhat abashed and coy, a fair short girl with a nice figure and pretty, sophisticated face, auburn curls dangling long at her ears, a precise row of bangs coming down to her eyebrows. She was a pink and white little lady, quick on foot, quicker of the blue eyes which measured the waiting guest from dusty feet to dusty hat in the glance that flashed over him in business-like brevity.

"Was you wishin' a room?" she inquired.

"If you can accommodate me."

"Register," she said, in voice of command, whirling the book about. At the same time she discovered the forgotten confection, which she removed to the top of the cigar case with an annoyed ejaculation under her breath that sounded rather strong. She applied her apron to the page, not helping it much, spreading the brown paste rather than removing it.

"You'll have to skip three or four lines, mister, unless you've got a 'delible pencil."

"No, I haven't. I'll write down here where it's dry."

And there the traveler wrote, the girl looking on sharply, spelling the letters with silently moving lips as the pen trailed them:

Calvin Morgan, Des Moines, Iowa.

"In and out, or regular?" the girl asked, twisting the book around to verify the upside-down spelling of his name.

"I expect it will be only for a few days," Morgan replied, smiling a little at the pert sufficiency of the clerk.

"It's a dollar a day for board and room—in advance in this man's town."

"Why in this man's town any more than any other man's town?" the guest inquired, amused.

"What would you think of a man that would run up a three weeks' bill and then walk out there and let somebody put a bullet through him?" she returned by way of answer.

"I think it would be a mean way to beat a board bill," he told her, seriously. "Do they do that right along here?"

"One smarty from Texas done it three or four months ago. Since then it's cash in advance."

Morgan thought it was a very wise regulation for a town where perils were said to be so thick, all in keeping with the notoriety of Ascalon. He made inquiry about something to eat. The girl's face set in disfavoring cast as she tossed her head haughtily.

"Dinner's over long ago," she told him.

Morgan made amends for this unwitting breach of the rules, wondering what there was in the air of Ascalon that incited people to become combative. Even this fresh-faced girl, not twenty, he was sure, was resentful, snappish without cause, inclined to quarrel if a word got crosswise in a man's mouth.

As he turned these things in mind, casting about for some place to stow his bag, the girl smiled across at him, the mockery going out of her bright eyes. Perhaps it was because she felt that she had defended the ancient right of hotel keepers to rise in dignified front when a traveler spoke of a meal out of the regular hour, perhaps because there was a gentleness and sincerity in the tall, honest-looking man before her that reached her with an appeal lacking in those who commonly came and went before her counter.

"Put your grip over there," she nodded, "and I'll see what I can find. If you don't mind a snack—" she hesitated.

"Anything—a slab of cold meat and a cup of coffee."

"I'll call you," she said, starting for the blue door.

The girl had reached it when there entered from the street a man, lurching when he walked as if the earth tipped under him like the deck of a ship. He was young and slender, dressed rather loudly in black sateen shirt and scarlet necktie, with broad blue, tassel-ornamented sleeve holders about his arms. He wore neither coat nor vest, but was belted with a pistol and booted and spurred, his calling of cowboy impressed in every line.

The girl paused, hand on the door, waiting to see what he wanted, and turned back when he rested his arms on the cigar case, clicking the glass with a coin. While she was making change for him, the cowboy stood with his newly bought cigar in his mouth, scanning the register. He seemed sober enough when standing still, save for the vacant, liquor-dead look of his eyes.

"Who wrote that?" he asked, pointing to Morgan's name.

"That gentleman," the girl replied, placing his change before him.

The cowboy picked up his money with numb fingers, fumbled to put it in his pocket, dropping it on the floor. He kicked at it with a curse and let it lie, scowling meantime at Morgan with angry eyes.

"Too good to write your name next to mine, are you?" he sneered. "Afraid it 'd touch your fancy handwritin', was you?"

"I didn't know it was your name, pardner," Morgan returned, conciliating the fellow as he would an irresponsible child. "Why, I'd walk a mile to write my name next to yours any day. There was something on the book—"

"You spit on it! You spit on my name!" the foolish fellow charged, laying hand to his pistol. "A man that's too good to write his name next to mine's too good to stay in the same house with me. You'll hit the breeze out of here, pardner, or you'll swaller lead!"

The girl came swiftly from behind the counter, and ran lightly to the door. Morgan put up his hand to silence the young man, knowing well that he could catch his slow arm before he could drag his gun two inches from the holster.

"Keep your gun where it is, old feller," he suggested, rather than warned, in good-natured tone. "I didn't mean any insult, but I'll take my hat off and apologize to you if you want me to. There was a piece of candy on the book right—"

"I'll put a piece of hot iron in your guts!" the cowboy threatened. He leaned over the register, hand still on his pistol, and tore out the offending page, crumpling it into a ball. "You'll eat this, then you'll hit the road back where you come from!"

The girl was beckoning to somebody from the door. Morgan was more annoyed and shamed by his part in this foolish scene than he was disturbed by any feeling of danger. He stood watching the young man's shooting arm. There was not more than five feet between them; a step, a sharp clip on the jaw, and the young fool would be helpless.

Morgan was setting himself to act, for the cowboy, whose face was warrant that he was a simple, harmless fellow when sober, was dragging on his gun, when one came hastening in past the girl.

This was no less important a person than the new city marshal, whom Morgan had seen without knowing his official standing, as he arrived at the hotel.

"This man's raisin' a fuss here—he's tore the register—look what he's done—tore the register!" the indignant girl charged.

"You're arrested," said the marshal. "Come on."

The cowboy stood mouthing his cigar, a weak look of scorn and derision in his flushed face. His right hand was still on his pistol, the wadded page of the register in the other.

"You'd better take his gun," Morgan suggested to the marshal. "He's so drunk he might hurt himself with it."

Seth Craddock fixed Morgan a moment with his sullen red eyes, in which the sneer of his heart seemed to speak. But his lips added nothing to the insult of that disdainful look. He jerked his head toward the door in command to his prisoner to march.

"Come out! I'll fight both of you!" the cowboy challenged, making for the door.

He was squarely in it, one foot lifted in his drunken balancing to step down, when

Seth Craddock jerked out his pistol between the lifting and the falling of that unsteady foot, and shot the retreating man in the back. The cowboy pitched forward into the street, where he lay motionless, one spurred foot still in the door.

Morgan sprang forward with an exclamation of shocked protest at this unjustified slaughter, while the girl, her blue eyes wide in horror, shrank against the counter, hands pressed to her cheeks, a cry of outraged pity ringing from her lips.

"Resist an officer, will you?" said the city marshal as he strode forward and looked down on the first victim in Ascalon of the woful harvest his pistol was to reap. So saying, as if publishing his justification, he sheathed his weapon and walked out, as little moved as if he had shot the bottom out of a tomato-can in practise among friends.

A woman came hastening from the back of the house with dough on her hands—a worn-faced woman, whose eyes were harried and afraid as if they had looked on violence until horror had set its seal upon them. She exclaimed and questioned, panting, frantic, holding her dough-clogged fingers wide as she bent to look at the slain man in her door.

"It was the new marshal Judge Thayer was in here with just after dinner," the girl explained, the pink gone out of her pretty face, the reflection of her mother's horror in her eyes.

"My God!" said the woman, clutching her breast, looking with a wilder terror into Morgan's face.

"Oh, I wish they'd take him away! I wish they'd take him away!" the girl moaned, cringing against the counter, covering her face with her hands.

Outside a crowd collected around the fallen man; for, common as death by violence was in the streets of Ascalon, the awe of its swift descent, the hushing mystery of its silence, fell as coldly over the hearts of men there as in the walks of peace. Presently the busy undertaker came with his black wagon to gather up this broken shape of what had been a man but a few minutes past.

The marshal did not trouble himself in the case further. Up the street Morgan saw him sauntering along, as unmoved and unconcerned, from all outward show, as if this might have been just one incidental task in a busy day. Resentment rose in Morgan as he watched the undertaker and his helper load the body into the wagon with unfeeling roughness; as he saw the marshal go into a saloon with a crowd of noisy fellows from the stock-pens who appeared to be applauding his deed.

This appeared to Morgan simply murder in the name of the law. That bragging, simple, whisky-numbed cowboy could not have hurt a cat. All desire for dinner was gone out of Morgan's stomach, all thought of preparing it from the girl's mind. She stood in the door with her mother, watching the black wagon roll away with this latest victim to be crushed in Ascalon's infernal mill, twisting her fingers in her apron, her face as white as the flour on her mother's hands. The undertaker's man came hurrying back with a bucket of water and a broom. The women turned away out of the door then, while he briskly went to work washing up the dark little puddle that had spread on the boards of the sidewalk.

"Dora, where's your pa?" the elder woman asked, stopping suddenly as she crossed the room, her face drawn in a quick stroke of fear, her hands lifted to ease the smothering in her breast again.

"I don't know, ma. He ain't been around since dinner."

The woman went to the door again, to lean and peer up and down the street with that great anxiety and trouble in her face that made it old, and distorted the faint trace of lingering prettiness out of it as if it had been covered with ashes.

"He's comin'," she said presently in a voice of immeasurable relief. She turned away from the door without allowing her glance to fall directly on the wet spot left by the undertaker's man.

Mother and daughter talked together in low words, only a few of which now and then reached Morgan as he stood near the counter where the mutilated register lay, turning this melancholy event over in his thoughts. He recovered the crumpled page

from the floor, smoothed and replaced it in the book. A man came in, the woman hurrying with a quick, glad lighting of the face to meet him.

"Oh, Tommy! I was worried to death!" she said.

Tom Conboy, proprietor of the Elkhorn, as this hotel was called, grunted in discount of this anxiety as he turned his shifty eyes to the stranger. Then he saw the coins dropped by the cowboy, picked them up, put them in his pocket, face red from what evidently was unaccustomed effort as he straightened his back.

"You seem to be gittin' mighty flush with money around this joint," he said, severe censure in his tone.

"He dropped it—the man the marshal shot dropped it—it was his," the girl explained. "I wouldn't touch it!" she shuddered, "not for anything in the world!"

"Huh!" said Conboy easily, entirely undisturbed by the dead man's money in his pocket.

"My God! I wish he hadn't done it here!" the woman moaned.

"I didn't think he'd shoot him, or I wouldn't 'a' called him," the girl pleaded, pity for the deed in her shocked voice. "He didn't need to do it—he didn't have to do it at all!"

"Sh! No niggers in Ireland, now—no-o-o niggers in Ireland!"

Conboy shook his head at her as he spoke, pronouncing this rather amazing and altogether irrelevant declaration with the utmost gravity, an admonitory inflection in his naturally grave and resonant voice. The girl said no more on the needless sacrifice of the young man's life.

"I was goin' to get this gentleman some dinner," she said.

"You'd better go on and do it, then," her father directed, gently enough for a person of his stamp, rather surprisingly gentle, indeed, Morgan thought.

Tom Conboy was a short-statured man, slight, his carefully trimmed gray beard lending a look of serious wisdom to his face which the shiftiness of his insincere eyes at once seemed to controvert. He wore neither coat nor vest, but a white shirt with broad starched bosom, a large gold button in its collarless neckband. A diamond stud flashed in the middle of his bosom; red elastic bands an inch broad, with silver buckles, held up the slack of the sleeves which otherwise would have enveloped his hands.

"Are you goin' to stay in the office a while now, Tommy, and look after things while Dora and I do the work?" the woman asked.

"I've got to get the jury together for the inquest," Conboy returned, with the briskness of a man of importance.

"Will I be wanted to give my testimony at the inquest, do you suppose?" Morgan inquired. "I was here when it happened; I saw the whole thing."

He spoke in the hope that he might be given the opportunity of relieving the indignation, so strong in him that it was almost oppressive, before the coroner's jury. Tom Conboy shook his head.

"No; the marshal's testimony is all we'll need," Conboy replied. "Resistin' arrest and tryin' to escape after arrest. That's all there was to it. These fellers 'll have to learn better than that with this new man. I know him of old—he's a man that always brings in the meat."

"But the young fellow didn't try to escape," Morgan protested. "He was so drunk he didn't know whether he was coming or going."

Conboy looked at him disfavoringly, as if to warn him to be discreet in matters of such remote concern to him as this.

"Tut, tut! No niggers in Ireland," said he, shaking his head with an expression between a caution and a threat.

CHAPTER IV.

MORGAN'S DEFIANCE.

NOT more than two hours after the tragedy at the Elkhorn Hotel, of which he was the indirect cause, Calvin Morgan appeared at Judge Thayer's little office. The judge had finished his preparation for the cattle-thief's case, and now sat ruminating it over his cob pipe. He nodded encouragingly as Morgan hesitated at the door.

"Come in, Mr. Morgan," he invited as cordially as if introductions had passed between them already and relations had been established on a footing pleasant and profitable to both.

Morgan smiled a little at this ready identification, remembering the torn page of the hotel register, which all the reading inhabitants of the town who were awake must have examined before this. He accepted the chair that Judge Thayer pushed toward him, nodding to the bone-wagon man who came sauntering past the door at that moment, the long lash of his bullhide whip trailing in the dust behind him.

"You've come to settle with us, I hear?" said the judge.

"I'm looking around with that thought, sir."

"I don't know how you'll do at the start in the optical way, Mr. Morgan—I'm afraid not much. I'd advise watch repairing and jewelry in addition. This town is going to be made a railroad division point before long; I could get you appointed watch inspector for the company. Now, I've got a nice little storeroom—"

"I'm afraid you've got me in the wrong deck," Morgan interrupted, unwilling to allow the judge to go on building his extravagant fancy. "I could no more fix a watch than I could repair a locomotive, and spectacles are as far out of my line as specters."

Judge Thayer's face reddened above his thick beard at this easy and fluent denial of all that he had constructed from a hasty and indefinite bit of information.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Morgan. It was Joe Lynch, the fellow that drives the bone-wagon, that got me wrong. He told me you were an oculist."

"I think that was his rendition of optimist, perhaps," Morgan said, laughing with the judge's hearty appreciation of the twist. "I told him, in response to a curious inquiry, that I was an optimist. I've tried hard—very hard, sometimes—to live up to it. My profession is one that makes a heavy drain on all the cheerfulness that nature or art ever stocked a man with, Judge Thayer."

"It sounds like you might be a lawyer," the judge speculated, "or maybe a doctor?"

"No; I'm simply an agriculturist, late professor of agronomics in the Iowa State Agricultural College. It takes optimism, believe me, sir, to try to get twenty bushels of wheat out of land where only twelve grew before or two ears of corn where only two-thirds of one has been the standard."

"You're right," Judge Thayer agreed heartily; "it takes more faith, hope, and courage to be a farmer than any other calling on earth. I often consider the risks a farmer must take year by year in comparison with other lines of business, staking his all very frequently on what he puts into the furrows, turning his face to God when he has sown his seed, in faith that rains will fall and frosts will be stayed. It is heroic, sometimes it is sublimely heroic. Are you going to try your fortunes here on the soil?"

"I've had my eye on this country a good while, in spite of the dismal tales of hardship and failure that have come eastward out of it. I've looked to it as the place for me to put some of my theories to the test. I believe alfalfa, or lucerne, as it is called back East, will thrive here, and I'm going to risk your derision and go a little further. I believe this can be made the greatest wheat country in America."

Judge Thayer brought his hand down with a smack of the palm that made his papers fly, his face radiating the pleasure that words alone could not express.

"I've been telling them that for seven years, Morgan!" he said.

"Hasn't it ever been tried out?"

"Tried out? They don't stay long enough to try out anything, Morgan. They're here to-day and gone to-morrow, cursing Kansas as they go, slandering it, branding it as the Tophet of the earth. We've never had the right kind of people here; they didn't have the courage, the faith and the vision. If a man hasn't got the grit and ability to stick through his losses at any game in this life, Morgan, he'll never win. And he'll never be anything but a little loser, put him down where you will."

"I've met hundreds of them dragging

their bones out of Kansas the past four or five years," Morgan nodded. "From what I can gather by talking with them, the trouble lies in their poverty when they come here. As you say, they're not staked to play this stiff game. A man ought to provision himself for a campaign against this country as he would for an arctic expedition. If he can't do it, he'd better stay away."

"I guess there's more to that than I ever stopped to consider myself," Judge Thayer admitted. "It is a hard country to break, but there must be men somewhere that can subdue it and reap its rewards."

"I tried to induce the railroad company to back me in an experimental farm out here, but the officials couldn't see it," Morgan explained. "I'm going to tackle it now on my lonesome. The best proof of a man's confidence in his own theories is to put them into practise himself, anyway."

"These cattlemen around here will laugh at you and try to discourage you, Morgan. I'm the standing joke of this country because I still stick to my theory of wheat."

"The farmers in Iowa laughed their teeth loose when we book farmers at the college told them they could add a million bushels a year to the corn crop of the State by putting a few more grains on the ends of the cobs. Well, they did it, just the same, in time."

"I heard about that," nodded the judge, warmed up to this long-backed stranger.

"Failure is written all over the face of this country," Morgan continued. "I took a long tramp across it this morning. But I believe I've got the formula that will tame it."

"I believe you, I believe you can do it," Judge Thayer indorsed him with enthusiasm. "I believe you've brought the light of a new epoch into this country; I believe you're carrying the key that's going to unlock these prairies and liberate the gold from under the grass-roots."

"It may be nothing but a dream," said Morgan softly, his eyes fixed on the blue distances through the open door. "Maybe it will break me and scatter my bones on the prairie for that old scavenger of men to haul away."

Judge Thayer shook his head in denial of this possibility, making note of this rugged dreamer's strong face, strong arms, large, capable hands.

"We're not away out West, as most people seem to think," he said; "only a little past the middle of the State. My observation through several years here has been that it rains about as much and as often in this part of the country as it does in the eastern part of the State, enough to make two crops in three, anyway, and that's as good as you can count on without irrigation anywhere."

Morgan agreed with a nod. Judge Thayer went on:

"The trouble is, this prairie sheds water like the roof of a house—shoots it off so quickly into the draws and creeks it never has a chance to soak in. Plow it, I tell 'em, and keep on plowing it, in season and out; fix it so it can soak up the rain and hold it. Is my theory right?"

"You've got the key to it yourself," Morgan told him, not a little surprised to hear this uncredited missionary preaching the very doctrine that men of Morgan's profession had found so hard to make converts to in the prairie country.

"But it will be two or three years, at least, before you can begin your experiment with wheat," Judge Thayer regretted. "By that time I'm afraid the settlers that are taking up land around here now will be broken and discouraged, gone to spread the curse against Kansas in the same old bitterness of heart."

"I hope to find a piece of land that somebody has abandoned or wants to sell, that has been farmed a year or two," Morgan confided. "If I can get hold of such a place I'll be able to put in a piece of wheat this fall—even a few acres will start me going. I could enlarge my fields with my experience."

Judge Thayer said he believed he had the very place Morgan was looking for listed for sale. But there were so many of them listed for sale, the owners gone, their equities long since eaten up by unpaid taxes, that it took the judge a good while to find the particulars in this special case.

"Man by the name of Gerhart, mile and

a half west of town—that would bring him pretty near the river—offers his quarter for three hundred dollars. He's been there about four years; wife died this spring. I think he's got about eighty acres broken out. Some of that land ought to be in pretty good shape for wheat by now."

As the day was declining to evening, and Judge Thayer's supper hour was near, they agreed on postponing until morning the drive out to look at the dissatisfied settler's land. Morgan was leaving when the judge called him back.

"I was just wondering whether you'd ever had any editorial experience?" he said.

"No, I've never been an editor," Morgan returned, speculating alertly on what might be forthcoming.

"We—our editor—our editor," went on the judge, fumbling his words as if he found the matter a difficult one to express, "fell into an unfortunate error of judgment a short time ago, with—h-m—somewhat melancholy—melancholy"—the judge paused, as if feeling of this term to see that it fitted properly, head bent thoughtfully—"results. Unlucky piece of business for this community, coming right in the thick of the contest for the county seat. There's a fight on here, Mr. Morgan, as you may have heard, between Ascalon, the present county seat, and Glenmore, a God-abandoned little fly-speck on the map seven miles south of here."

"I hadn't heard of it. And what happened to the editor?"

"Oh, one of our hot-headed boys shot him," said the judge. "Since then I've been getting out the paper myself—I hold a mortgage on the property; I'll be obliged to foreclose to protect myself—with the help of the printer. It's not much of a paper, Morgan, for I haven't got the time to devote to it with the July term of court coming on, but I have to get it out every week or lose the county printing contract. There's a hungry dog over at Glenmore looking on to snatch the bone on the least possible excuse, and he's got two of the county commissioners with him."

"No, I'm not an editor," Morgan repeated speculatively, as if he saw possibilities of distinction in that road.

"Without the press we are a community disarmed in the midst of our enemies," continued the judge. "Glenmore will overwhelm us and rob us of our rights, without a champion whose voice is as the voice of a thousand men."

"I'd never be equal to that." Morgan shook his head in all seriousness. "Is the editor out of it for good? Is he dead?"

"They have a devilish peculiarity of seldom wounding a man here in Ascalon, Mr. Morgan. I've wished more than once they were not so cursed proficient. The poor fellow fell dead, sir, at the first shot, while he was reaching for his gun."

"I've seen something of their proficiency here," Morgan said with plain contempt.

Judge Thayer looked at him sharply. "You refer to that affair at the hotel this afternoon?"

"It was a brutal and uncalled-for sacrifice of human life! It was murder in the name of the law."

"I think you are somewhat hasty and unjust in your criticism, Mr. Morgan," the judge mildly protested. "I know the marshal to be a cool-headed man, a man who can see perils that you and I might overlook until too late for our own preservation. The fellow must have made some break for his gun that you didn't see."

"I hope it was that way," Morgan said, willing to give the marshal every shadow of justification.

"I've known Seth Craddock a long time; he was huntin' buffalo for the railroad contractors when I first came to this country. Why, I appointed Seth to the office not more than an hour before that mix-up at the hotel."

"He's beginning early," Morgan observed.

"The man that's going to clean up this town must begin early and work late," Judge Thayer declared. "An officer that would allow anybody to run a bluff on him wouldn't last two hours."

"I suppose not," Morgan admitted.

"As I told Seth when I swore him in, what we want in Ascalon is a marshal that will use his gun oftener, and to better purpose, than the men that have gone before him. This town must be purified; the

offal of humanity that makes a stench until it offends the heavens, and spreads our obscene notoriety to the ends of the earth, must be swept out before we can induce sober and substantial men to bring their families into this country."

"It looks reasonable enough," Morgan agreed.

"Hell's kettle is on the fire in this town, Mr. Morgan; the devil's own stew is bubbling in it. If I could induce you to defer your farming experiment a few months, much as I approve it, anxious as I am to see you demonstrate your theories and mine, I believe we could accomplish the regeneration of this town. With a man of Craddock's caliber on the street, and you in the *Headlight* office speaking with the voice of a thousand men, we could reverse public opinion and draw friends to our side. Without some such support, I view the future with gloom and misgiving. Glenmore will displace us as the capital of the county, and Ascalon will decline to a whistling station by the side of the track."

"I'm afraid I wouldn't care to hitch up with Mr. Craddock in the regeneration of Ascalon," Morgan remarked. "We'd pull so hard in opposite directions we'd break the harness."

Judge Thayer expressed his regret while he slipped on his black alpaca coat, asking Morgan to wait until he locked his door, when he would walk with him as far as the hotel corner. On the way they met a young man who came bowling along with a great air of importance and self-assurance, a fresh cigar tilted up in his mouth to such an angle that it threatened the brim of his large white hat.

Judge Thayer introduced this man as Dell Hutton, county treasurer. Hutton wrung Morgan's hand with an ardent grip, as if he welcomed him into the brotherhood of the elect in Ascalon, speaking out of the corner of his mouth around his cigar. He was a thin-mouthed man of twenty-five, or perhaps a year or two older, with a shrunken wizenness about his face that made him look like an old man done over and poorly renovated. His eyes were pale, with shadows in them as of inquiry and distrust; his stature was short, his frame slight.

Hutton seemed to be deeply, even passionately, interested in the venture Morgan had come to make in that country. He offered his services in any exigency where they might be applied, shaking hands again with a hard grip, accompanied by a wrinkling of his thin mouth about his cigar as he clamped his jaws in the fervor of his earnestness. But he appeared to be under a great pressure to go his way, his eyes controverting the sincerity of his words the while.

"He's rather a young man to be filling such a responsible position," Morgan ventured as they resumed their way.

"Dell wasn't elected to the office," Judge Thayer explained. "He's filling out his father's term."

"Did he—die?" Morgan inquired, marveling over the mortality among the notables of the town.

"He was a victim of this feud in the rivalry for the county seat," Judge Thayer explained with sadness. "It was due to Hutton, more than any other force, that we didn't lose the county seat at the last election. He kept the cattlemen lined up, was a power among them, followed that business a long time himself. Yes. He was the first man that ever drove a herd of cattle from Texas to load for market when this railroad was put through. Some of those skulkers from Glenmore shot him down at his door two months after he took office."

"I thought the boy looked like he'd been trained on the range," Morgan observed thoughtfully.

"Yes, Dell was raised in the saddle; drove several trips from Texas up here. Dell"—softly, a little sorrowfully, Morgan thought—"was the other principal in that affair with our late editor."

"Oh, I see. He was exonerated?"

"Clear case of self-defense; proved that Smith—the editor was Smith—reached for his gun first."

Morgan did not comment, but he thought that this seemed a thing easily proved in Ascalon. He parted from the judge at the bank corner, which was across from the hotel.

The shadow of the hotel fell far into the

public square, and in front of the building, their chairs placed in what would have been the gutter of the street if the thoroughfare had been paved, their feet braced with probably more comfort than grace against the low sidewalk, a row of men were stationed, like crows on a fence. There must have been twenty or more of them, in various stages of undress from vest down to suspenders, from bright cravats flaunting over woolen shirts and white shirts and striped shirts and speckled shirts, to unconfined necks laid bare to the breeze.

Whether these were guests awaiting supper, or merely loafers awaiting anything that might happen next, Morgan had not been long enough in town to determine. He noticed the curious and, he thought, unfriendly eyes which they turned on him as he approached. And as Morgan set foot on the sidewalk porch of the hotel, Seth Craddock, the new city marshal, rose out of the third chair on the end of the row nearest him, hand lifted in commanding signal to halt.

"You've just got time to git your gripsack," Craddock said, coming forward as he spoke, but stepping a little to one side as if to allow Morgan passage to the door.

"Time's no object to me," Morgan returned, good-humored and undisturbed, thinking this must be one of the jokes at the expense of strangers for which Ascalon was famous.

Some of the loafers were standing by their chairs in attitude of indecision, others sat leaning forward to see and hear. Traffic both ways on the sidewalk came to a sudden halt at the spectacle of two men in a situation recognized at a glance in quick-triggered Ascalon as significant, those who came up behind Morgan clearing the way by edging from the sidewalk into the square.

"The train 'll be here in twelve minutes," Craddock announced, watch in his palm.

"On time, is she?" Morgan said indifferently, starting for the door.

Again Seth Craddock lifted his hand. Those who had remained seated along the gutter perch up to this moment now got to their feet with such haste that chairs were upset. Craddock put his hand casually to his pistol, as a man rests his fingers on his hip.

"You're leavin' on it," he said.

"I guess you've got the wrong man," Morgan suggested, noting everything with comprehensive eye, not a little concerned by the marshal's threatening attitude. If this were going to turn out a joke, Morgan wished it might begin very soon to show some of its risible features on the surface, in order that he might know which way to jump to make the best figure possible.

"No, I ain't got no wrong man!" Craddock returned, making mockery of the words, uttering them jeeringly out of the corner of his mouth. He blasted Morgan with the glare of his malevolent red eyes, redder now than before his weapon had moistened the street of Ascalon with blood. "You're the feller that's been shootin' off your mouth about murder in the name of the law, and you bein' able to take his gun away from that feller. Well, kid, I'm afraid it's goin' to be a little too rough for you in this town. You're leavin'—you won't have time to git your gripsack now; you can write for it!"

Morgan felt the blood flaming into his face with the hot swell of anger. A moment he stood eye to eye with Craddock, fighting down the defiance that rose for utterance to his lips. Then he started again toward the hotel door.

Craddock whipped out his pistol with arm so swift that the eye multiplied it like a spoke in a quick-spinning wheel. He stood holding the weapon so, his wrist rather limber, the muzzle of the pistol pointing in the general direction of Morgan's feet.

"Maybe you can take a gun away from me, little feller?" Craddock challenged in high mockery, one nostril of his long nose twitching, lifting his mustache on that side in a snarl.

"Don't point that gun at me, Craddock!" Morgan warned, his voice unshaken and cool, although the surge of his heart made his seasoned body vibrate to the finger-tips.

"Scratch gravel for the depot!" Craddock commanded, lowering the muzzle of

his gun as if he intended to hasten the going by a shot between the offender's feet.

The men were separated by not more than two yards, and Morgan made no movement to widen the breach immediately following the marshal's command to go. On the contrary, before any that saw him standing there in apparent indecision, and least of all among them Seth Craddock, could measure his intention, Morgan stepped aside quicker than the watchers calculated any living man could move, reached out his long arm in a flash faster than he had shifted on his feet, and laid hold of the city marshal's hairy wrist, wrenching it in a twist so bone-breaking that nerves and muscles failed their office. Nobody saw exactly how he accomplished it, but the next moment Morgan stepped back from the city marshal, that officer's revolver in his hand.

"Mr. Craddock," he said in calm, advisory way, "I expect to stay around this part of the country some little time, and I'll be obliged to come to Ascalon once in a while. If you think you're going to feel uncomfortable every time you see me, I guess the best thing for you to do is to leave. I'm not saying you must leave; I don't set myself up to tell a man when to come and go without I've got that right over him. I just suggest it for your comfort and peace of mind. If you stay here you'll have to get used to seeing me around."

Craddock stood for a breath, glaring at the man who had humiliated him in his new dignity, clutching his half paralyzed wrist. He said nothing, but there was the proclamation of a death feud in his eyes.

"Give him a gun, somebody!" said a fool in the crowd that pressed to the edge of the sidewalk at the marshal's back.

Tom Conboy, standing in his door ten feet away, interposed quickly, waving the crowd back and called out:

"Tut, tut! No niggers in Ireland, now!"

"He can have this one," announced Morgan, still in the same measured, calm voice. He offered the pistol back to its owner, who snatched it with ungracious hand, shoved it into his battered scabbard, turned to the crowd at his back with an oath.

"Scatter out of here!" he ordered, covering his degradation as he might in this tyrannical exercise of authority.

Morgan looked into the curious faces of people who blocked the sidewalk ahead of him, withdrawn a discreet distance, not yet venturing to come on. Except for the red handkerchief that he had worn about his neck, he was dressed as when he arrived in Ascalon on Joe Lynch's wagon, coatless, the dust of the road on his shoes. In place of the bright handkerchief he now wore a slender black necktie, the ends of it tucked into his gray woolen shirt.

He felt taller, rawer, more angular than nature had built him as he stood there looking at the people who had gathered like leaves against a rock in a brook. He was ashamed of his part in the public show, sorry that anybody had been by to witness it. In his embarrassment he pushed his hat back from his forehead, looking around him again as if he would break through the ranks and hide himself from such confusing publicity.

The crowd was beginning to disperse at Seth Craddock's urging, although those who had come to a stand on the sidewalk seemed timid about passing Morgan. They still held back as if to give him room, or in uncertainty whether it was all over yet. Perhaps they expected Craddock to turn on Morgan again when he had cleared a proper space for his activities.

As for Morgan, he had dismissed the city marshal from his thoughts, for something else had risen in his vision more worthy the attention of a man. This was the face of a girl on the edge of the crowd in front of him—a tall, strong, pliant creature who leaned a little as if she looked for her reflection in a stream.

She was garbed in a brown duck riding-skirt, white waist with a bright wisp of cravat blowing at her breast like the red of bittersweet against snow. Her dusty sombrero threw a shadow over her eyes, but Morgan could see that they were dark and friendly eyes, such as no shadow but night could obscure. The other faces became in that moment merely the incidental background for one; his heart lifted and leaped as the heart moves and yearns with tender

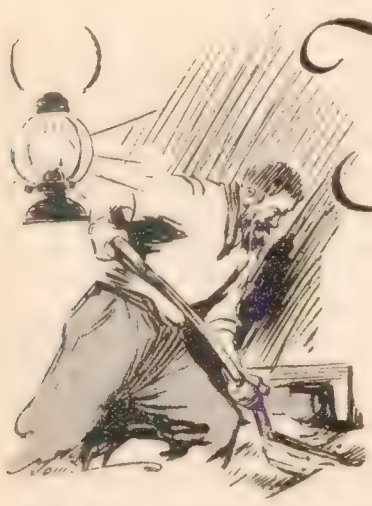
quickening at the sound of some old melody that makes it glad.

Morgan stepped back, thinking only of her, seeing only her, making a way for her only to pass. That others might follow was not in his mind. He stepped out of the way for her.

She came on toward him now, one finished, one refined, among that press of crudity, one unlooked-for in that place of wild lusts and dark passions unrestrained. She carried a packet of newspapers and letters under her bent arm, telling of her mission on the street; the thong of her riding-quirt was about her wrist. Her soft, dark hair was low on her neck, a flush as of the pleasure that speaks in bounding blood when friend meets friend glowed in her face. Morgan removed his hat as she passed him. She looked into his face and smiled.

The little crowd broke and followed, but Morgan, oblivious to the movement around him, stood on the sidewalk edge looking after her, his hat in his hand.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



The Silo

by

George Allan England

THE roaring of the eight horse-power gasoline-engine and of the voracious ensilage-cutter, out there in the yard, blending with the windy chatter of the cut corn as it skittered up the pipe and whirled down into the dark silo, masked the coming of Lucky Ruggles. Pownall swung up from broadcasting a shovelful of ensilage that he had dug out of the swiftly growing mound under the pipe, to find himself confronted by the man he feared and hated more than any in this world.

Ruggles grinned, and spat tobacco. An absurd figure to be afraid of—a slouching hobo, with an old cloth cap on, a long black coat possibly stolen from some scarecrow, and torn trousers tucked into a pair of wornout high boots that a farmer's wife had given him. A weak figure, unshaven and watery-eyed; but packed with potential dynamite for Pownall, nope the less.

"Hello, there, Powdy!" the hobo greeted the proprietor of the farm. He swaggered a little, with dirty hands deep in trouser pockets, and scuffed his boot-toes into the soft ensilage. "Glad t' see me, ain't you? An' I'm sure glad t' see *you!* This is my lucky mornin'. They're all lucky mornin's to Lucky Ruggles. That's me!"

Pownall could only stare, with fallen jaw. The inwhirling fodder, shot down from the curved pipe high aloft, flicked him with bits of corn-leaf and stalk. At his side, now that he had stopped shoveling, swiftly rose the pile of chopped corn. Only unceasing toil with the shovel and with trampling feet could keep it level in the silo.

"Well, ain't you glad to see an ole friend like me?" demanded Ruggles, squinting with that evil, watery eye. This eye gladdened at sight of his victim's fear. Not

even the vague light from the hole in the roof, where the pipe came through, could mask the lines and hues of terror on Pownall's bearded face.

"How—how the devil did *you* git here?" stammered Pownall. He raised the shovel as if to strike.

"Lay off on that rough stuff!" commanded Ruggles, his stubbly jaw stiffening. "You ain't never gonna hit *me*, see?"

"Git outa here!"

"When I'm damn good an' ready! I didnt' come here to—"

"You got no right on this here farm. Git!"

Lucky Ruggles only laughed.

"You got the nerve, I must say!" he gibed. "After what I'm wise to about you! Now, looka here, mister. I'm gonna have a little privut talk with you, see? We got a few minutes all to our lonesomes. This here's a swell place fer a privut talk, ain't it?" He glanced appraisingly about the silo. "Nobody seen me come. Nobody knows I'm here. So it's all hunky-dory. Some luck, hey?"

"Cut that out!" retorted Pownall. "I got nothin' to say to *you!*"

The men's voices were hardly audible over the droning roar of the machinery, the whirring of the corn. This racket had kept Pownall from hearing Ruggles as the hobo had climbed the ladder into the silo.

Unseen by the workers in the yard, Ruggles had crept up through the meadow, skirted the stone wall and gained the south side of the barn. Here a door had admitted him. The rest had been easy. Now, with that grin of conscious and cruel power, he confronted the gray-faced victim of his blackmail.

"What d'you want o' me?" Pownall demanded.

"Oh, you don't know! Oh, no! My letter—you got it, all right."

"T'hell with your letter, an' you, too!"

"You ain't gonna come across with that thousand?"

"Git out o' here!"

"All right," grinned the tramp with yellowed snags of teeth. "Suits *me!* But I'm goin' right from here to them insurance people. An' they'll slip me a few, fer wisin' 'em up. I'm playin' in luck, either way. Lucky Ruggles, that's me!"

"They won't believe no bum like you!"

"We'll see about that, mister. An' when you're doin' a five-year bit you'll reckon a thousand bucks is pretty small money to be holdin' out on me. A man what 'll stay in the big house ruther'n cough up at the rate o' two hundred bucks a year, ain't *much!*"

"I'll say *you* set the fire! I'll—"

"Ta-ta, mister!"

Lucky Ruggles turned to go. Then Pownall struck.

II.

A SHOVEL-BLADE may be a murderous weapon in strong hands of hate and terror.

The hobo crumpled forward. He fell, face-down, in the soft ensilage. Immediately a storm of tiny fragments of corn sprayed itself over his motionless body.

Pownall recoiled against the sweeping curve of the silo wall, his eyes white-rimmed with horror. He dropped the shovel. Flat against the wall his calloused fingers extended widely. His back pressed that wall, as if he were trying to push further away from the silent figure.

"Ruggles!" he cried.

No answer. Then Pownall laughed explosively.

It came as a relief after all. Now that the thing, often dreamed, was really done, the farmer felt a vast lightening of his soul's burden. It wasn't hard, was it, to kill a man? Why, an ox required twice as hard a blow! And a man—but was this blackmailing snake a man?

"Damn you!" mouthed Pownall, and stumbled toward the body.

Already it was half hidden by the tornado of ensilage. Pownall understood where his own safety lay, and laughed again. No one had seen the tramp. No one knew. And here, actively at hand, was burial.

He dragged the body, still face-downward, more into the direct line of discharge of the pipe. He stood up and watched the swift drive of the cut fodder over it. Then an idea whipped him to the quick. What *if* somebody had happened to see, to know?

That might be possible. Somebody might have been in the barn. Might be there, even now.

Pownall's heart thrashed, sickeningly. An obsession clutched him that somebody really was in the barn. Quivering, he recoiled. He must know!

He stumbled to the tall row of openings that, one above the other, extended up one side of the great cylindrical pit. Through one of these openings—later to be closed by doors, as the silo should fill—he swung himself to the ladder. His legs shook so that he could hardly clamber down. His hands felt puttylike and lax. He dragged himself out to the barn floor. Horribly afraid, he peered up and down.

His terror had him as a dog has a rat, shaking him. But in spite of everything he felt the surge of an immeasurable gladness. Ruggles was dead! Dead, and well punished for all his threats of blackmail, ruin, imprisonment.

"He was a skunk, anyhow," thought the farmer. "I kill skunks on sight. Damned, egg-suckin' skunks! He's only gittin' what was comin' to him!"

Pownall was sick and weak. His mouth felt baked. He swallowed hard. What he wanted was a drink. Water! He walked unsteadily to the faucet that supplied the horse-trough near the big barn door. He drew a dipper of water, and gulped it. The water slopped down his neck and chest, wetting his beard, his shirt. That felt good! He smeared his mouth with his hairy hand, and grew calmer.

"It was comin' to him all right," he repeated, and blinked at the October sunshine, golden through the crimsoned maples by the roadside. "Comin' to him!"

What made Pownall's head feel so queer? He wondered dully. For a few minutes he stood there at the door, breathing hard. No one passed along the lonely road. He could hear the engine and the cutter still at work back of the barn; the shouts of a teamster, bringing up still another load of corn from the field. He grinned, crookedly. He couldn't think very straight; but still he realized that he was safe and that Ruggles had only got what was coming to him.

"Lucky Ruggles!" he gulped. "He played it once too often. Out o' luck fer once. Huh!"

It struck him as something of a joke after all. A grim jest. He was laughing a little as he turned back into the barn.

Was there anybody on the barn? Of course not! What an idea, eh? This was a relief. The empty stalls and stanchions peered at him vacantly. The haymows listened. But no human face was visible. In the silo the corn was still rattling down the pipe whickering on to the pile.

"Only a tramp," thought Pownall. "Got no home, no folks. I'm a damn fool to worry!"

He breathed deep, and returned to the silo. He felt so glad! Glad it was all over and done with. Glad he was free at last.

"An' it was comin' to him all right!"

He approached the ladder, up along the staring row of openings into the silo. The four lowest openings were closed by doors, each two feet high. That meant eight feet of corn already lay in the silo. He squinted up the ladder, past the haymow, to the roof, where the pipe came through.

"That's great stuff, that corn," he realized. "It 'll bury him in no time. Gosh, but this is lucky fer me!"

He felt calm now. The first nervous shock had passed. A great coolness was possessing him. What danger could there possibly be? No one had seen, no one knew. And already the body would be hidden. Even without packing down, the avalanche of corn would bury it. Was there ever such wondrous fortune?

He remained there at the foot of the ladder, thinking. There was no hurry. Let the corn pile in, more and more! The hobo's threats of a year's standing pictured themselves with what vivid detail! How distinctly Pownall remembered that July night on the other farm, the old Marshfield farm! A year ago? More. Fifteen months!

"That place was no good anyhow," said Pownall, and bit tobacco from his plug. Yes, a chew would do him good. He never remembered tobacco tasting so fine.

The old farm had been isolated, played out, unproductive. A losing proposition. Even his housekeeper—old, crabbed Mrs.

Green—had not wanted to stay there. He had so longed for a fire, for his insurance money, so that he could get away and buy a place elsewhere! And then that night when Mrs. Green had been gone—that high wind, and the crashing thunder-storm at eleven o'clock. The lightning had struck an elm, close to the barn. Half stunned, Pownall had blinked from the house, out into the deluged dark, the flashing dazzle.

God! Why hadn't that lightning struck the barn?

The thought had flamed into inspiration, whiter than the lightning. A match had done the rest. But the tramp in the hay-mow had seen. Had understood. Only fifty dollars had shut the tramp's mouth and had got him away into the night before the old hand-tub had come pelting up from the village, dragged by long lines of drenched, panting men in disarray. Strange sights in the blinding glare of the flame-sheets from the barn. Pownall could still hear the lowing of the terrified cattle he had released. Could still hear the *thud-thud-thud* of the pump-bars.

Nothing had availed. The house connected with the barn by a low shed had gone, too. Pownall had toiled, sweating and rain-soaked, with the others. He had labored to exhaustion at the pump-bars. No use! The well, sucked dry by the old leathern hose, had made no impression on the howling flames, storm-driven, that had reddened the whole countryside. The house and barn had gone flat in an hour. No one had suspected anything.

Everybody had been kind. Had commiserated him. Later the insurance company had paid to the last penny, without question. For the policy had covered lightning.

Three thousand dollars. Cash. In place of that useless old set of buildings. Then he had sold the land for eight hundred. He had bought this newer, better farm. He had prospered there.

At first he had been afraid. But in a year, in fifteen months, fear had died. Nothing had remained of it but a few words. The words spoken by the hobo as he had slouched away with the fifty dollars toward the blackness of the wood-lot:

"Mum's the word fer now! But if I need kale, I'll write. My name's Ruggles. Lucky Ruggles. You'll mebbe hear from me ag'in. An' if you do, you'll be nice to me, won't you? An' shoot me a few bucks? I'll say you will! S'-long!"

For a whole year, no word of the hobo. Maybe, Pownall had hoped, he had got into jail somewhere, or been killed by a freight. So Pownall had ceased to be afraid. Then the scrawled letter had come, demanding a thousand. Pownall had not answered, but his soul had wilted with the blight of a very great fear. And the hobo had come back, just a few minutes ago. And now—

Now the man he had so cringed from, in terror, was lying dead in the silo. And no one know.

"God!" exclaimed Pownall. "Ain't that great, though?"

He climbed the ladder; and as he climbed panic struck him again. That shovel! It might have blood on it. Somebody might have climbed into the silo while he had been getting a drink, and might have found it. Might have found the body, too. His mind leaped to those possibilities. He knew that no one had entered the barn, and yet—

His hands shook as he scrambled up the ladder and sprawled into the gloomy damp of the silo. The little doorway into the silo was green. A kind of subconscious vision touched his mind of another little green door. The door of the room where the electric-chair was waiting. With a dry throat and hot pulses the farmer stumbled into the soft masses of the chopped corn, not now evenly spread or trampled down.

His relief was immediate, vast. Nobody was there. The shovel still remained just where he had left it, against the curving silo wall. Its blade was already buried deep in the drift of flicking ensilage. The pipe, far aloft, was still whirling corn with a roar and rattle, in stinging blasts. A heap, five or six feet high, now filled the center of the silo. The heap slanted down on all sides to the level of the corn at the walls. This level itself was about eight feet from the cement bottom of the silo.

"God!" grunted Pownall again, and rubbed his palms up and down along his dirty overalls, as if cleansing them of some-

thing. Blood, perhaps. But there was no blood on his hands. Nor on the shovel-blade either. It looked quite clean and bright.

Pownall was not an imaginative man. He was a hard-fisted, cold-livered New England farmer. He set to work now, once more spreading and trampling down the corn. At his third thrust of the shovel, he encountered something hard. He prodded, poked away the corn, and saw a boot-heel. He laughed then and fell to his task with a good heart.

Quite as if nothing had happened he labored. With sweat and a great joy, he completed the burial of Lucky Ruggles. Pownall was not afraid any more. Not horrified any more. Only glad. Supremely, triumphantly glad!

The feeling of the corn under his feet, under his shovel—green grave, that for long months would hold its inviolable secret till that secret could be well and finally disposed of—afforded him a kind of terrible joy.

He worked without effort, upborne by calm powers. Sweat streamed down his face and body. He revelled in it as in the roar of the engine, the clatter of the ensilage in the pipe, the cascading flood of corn still shooting down.

As the silo filled, he closed another door. Later, still another. Soon, four feet of packed corn, neatly on a level, lay above the body of the hobo. By noon this had increased to eight feet and more.

The noon whistle, shrilling far from the village sawmill, shut down the corn-cutting and brought the laboring teams and men to rest. Still Pownall worked on, leveling, stamping down, oblivious to the cessation of the floods of corn. His work seemed to have become mechanical, involuntary. His hands and feet toiled, but his brain took no cognizance of that toil. It was busied with the greatest happiness that it had ever known.

When the man from the engine came into the barn to see what progress had been made in filling the silo, and clambered up the ladder, he found Pownall still shoveling, still tramping the corn. This was now sixteen feet above the cement bottom.

"Hey, there!" the engine man laughed, elbows on the bottom of the door into the silo. "What's the matter o' you, anyhow? Time to quit. Fine mornin's work!"

Pownall started, seemed to waken as from a dream.

"You betcha!" he answered, leaning on his shovel. "We'll pack this to the roof by night. A fine morning's work is right. The best *I* ever done!"

III.

Over and over, all that autumn and half the winter, Pownall calculated everything to a nicety. He did not brood with any regrets, any compunction over the killing. Insensitive, conscienceless, he lost no sleep. But many of his waking hours were devoted to the approaching last chapter of the story. No detail was overlooked.

"He'll keep fine," thought the farmer with exultation. An enduring happiness was his now that the sole witness to his arson and his insurance fraud had vanished. "He'll keep, same as ensilage keeps, in the middle o' the silo. There's tons o' corn on him, an' it's reekin' with alcohol." The alcohol had, indeed, been so plentiful in this corn that some of it had even run out at the bottom of the silo. "He's pickled, that's what he is. He'll be in good shape when I git down to diggin' him out. But I got to be ready fer that, too."

He planned everything to a t. There had been thirty-six feet of corn in the silo, covering eighteen doors up the side. Seventeen cows would eat about three-quarters of the ensilage in four months. The body of Ruggles lay about eight feet from the bottom of the silo. Thus, in the natural course of events, Pownall would exhume the body about the middle of February.

"But I ain't goin' to wait exactly fer that," decided Pownall. "By February fust I'll git him out, an' plant him. That 'll be the safest way."

He arranged every detail, even to having his housekeeper, Mrs. Green, plan on a visit to her married daughter in Haverhill, about that time. He thought even of the blanket he intended to take with him into the silo, to wrap and carry the body in.

Nor did he forget that he would dig the grave in the barn cellar, and then install a pig-pen over it.

"There ain't no possible way fer a slip-up," said he to his soul. "This here farm is 'way off the main road. Nobody much comes by here but the R. F. D. man; an' of a Sunday *he* don't come. With the barn door shet, an' workin' early of a Sunday mornin', it 'll go through. Sure as death an' taxes!

"In the books they allus gits ketched. But *I* won't git ketched. Nobody knows he was here. He ain't got no folks, ner nothin'. There *couldn't* be nothin' safer!"

He carried out his plans with the cold accuracy of a machine. On Friday, February 2, Mrs. Green departed for Haverhill. She left him a pantry full of cooked victuals and an infinitude of directions about household details. When he had driven her to the desolate railroad-station and had seen her depart, he returned home, ready for his task. The frozen solitude of the farm did not appal him. It only cheered him with assurances of complete and final success.

That afternoon he built a pig-pen in a dry corner of the barn cellar. So far, so good. He slept well that night. Next day, Saturday, he dug a deep, ample grave in the pig-pen. Again he slept well. Things were going forward, eh?

Sunday his alarm-clock awoke him very early. His nerves were steady as a church, ready for the *finis* of his book.

He fortified himself with a hearty breakfast and two cups of hot coffee. By lantern-light he went out to the barn, where the blanket was already waiting. A crisp winter morning, long before dawn. Hard stars and a steely, gibbous moon surveyed him as his alert form crossed the yard. His boots creaked the frozen snow.

He foddered and grained the cattle, watered them, and milked, all as usual. Then he tossed the blanket into the silo, climbed up there with his lantern, took his fork and began digging.

The lantern hung on a nail driven into the silo wall, betrayed no anxiety on his bearded face. What anxiety could he feel? So far, all his actions had been quite natural, without suspicion. He reckoned that it would take him only an hour to exhume and carry the body into the cellar, bury it and turn the pigs into the new pen. His chances of discovery were, practically speaking, just *nil*. Not once had anybody called at the farm so early. No one would call this particular morning.

"Dead easy!" he grunted as he dug.

Pownall was in no sense an emotional man, nor was he given to introspection. The job ahead of him did not even strike him as particularly unpleasant. It was just something that had to be gone through with as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.

The empty silo doors, ranged in a vertical tier, gave him his exact location. Twelve of these doors were now visible. That meant twenty-four feet of the corn had been used. Counting up from the cement floor of the silo, he knew the body lay opposite the top of the fourth door, or about eight feet from the bottom. Pownall had reviewed this fact unnumbered times, and felt as positive of it as of life itself. There could be no slightest question about it. Pownall would have gambled his existence on the fact that Ruggles was about four feet below the present level of the ensilage.

Digging down four feet into a tightly packed mass of fine-cut corn is a fairish job, but not formidable.

"I'll have him out o' here, an' buried, inside of an hour," Pownall assured himself. He spat on his hands and fell vigorously to work.

Steadily, unemotionally he toiled, his breath steamy on the chill air. His shadow, huge, grotesquely distorted, rose and fell as the smoky lantern—specially filled for the occasion—cast it against the opposite wall. Above a huge black vault peered down at him from the snow-covered, conical roof.

Only familiar sounds came to him from the barn—the lowing of a cow, the trampling of a horse. Outside, silence. And inside the dim wooden cylinder, silence, too; silence, save for the deep breathing of the farmer, or an occasional *thud* as a forkful of ensilage struck the wooden wall.

Pownall labored for perhaps twenty minutes, in the remembered spot where he had seen the cascades of fresh ensilage—now

brown and reeking of fermentation—whirl down on Lucky Ruggles, burying him. In spite of the February cold, sweat began to runnel his face and trickle down his beard. He stopped now and then to smear it off, and spit. Resting on his fork, which he plunged into the corn, he eased his back and recovered his wind.

"I'm 'most down to him now," he reckoned. "Cal'lated to of found him afore, if I'd knowed where to look exactly. But I'll git him now, in a few minutes."

He still felt calm enough, though his heart was beginning to trip a little. After all, he'd rather be working at something else. But—well, it had to be gone through with, hadn't it?

Again he dug.

"Ha!" he grunted with a leap of the heart. "There's a boot now!"

He stooped and tugged at the boot. He pulled hard. There was no resistance. The boot came right up, free, in his hand. He all but tumbled backward.

"*Huh!* That's funny!"

Furiously he shoveled, breathing hard. Another boot—also empty.

"Lord! What—"

He remained there, peering down at something he could not understand.

He stumbled over to the lantern, his face gray. He unhooked the lantern, carried it to the trench he had dug in the ensilage. Its smoky red gleam revealed the terror on his face. Panting, now, with sweat clabbering on his forehead, he swung the lantern down into the vacancy of the empty trench.

"Jest two boots, an' that's all!" he mouthed. "But—God—it can't be so! It *can't!* He was here an' I killed him. An' buried him. A dead man can't git out of his boots an' dig through tons o' fodder, an' git away! He can't. He can't!"

Pownall hung up the lantern again with sick hands. He hurled the boots to one side. Half blind with horror that could not reason, he flung himself once more into his labor.

As he dug he wheezed. Disjointed words came gulping from his throat, a throat constricted as by a cold and lifeless hand:

"A dead man can't—he can't—*he can't—*"

They found him, late that night, still digging.

The mooing and trampling of the untended cattle brought a couple of passing neighbors into the barn. A gleam of light from the silo, and the sound of laughter, drew them thither.

A great mound of ensilage had been tossed out, on to the barn floor. Tons of it. They climbed this, to the open door, and peered in.

Below their level, they looked down on the madly toiling figure of a man who dug aimlessly, tossing the fodder back and forth, sifting it, sometimes even scraping to the very bottom of the silo. This man dug, staggered, laughed, wept, dug again, and called with horrible blasphemies on the name of God to witness that a dead man cannot move.

By the smoldering rays of the expiring lantern the sight appalled them.

"Hey, Pownall! Hey, you, Pownall!" shouted the bolder of the two neighbors. "Whatcha doin'? What's the matter o' you?"

Pownall answered nothing. It seemed as if he could not even hear them. Haggard, with sweat-blinded and ghastly face, he labored aimlessly. A creature wounded to the death, a mole that perishes even as it digs, he groveled in the corn. He flung himself on hands and knees, shoved his arms into the fodder, pawed and clutched and cursed, prayed, laughed again. The laughter was worst of all. That froze the neighbor's blood.

Suddenly the lantern shot a sick flame up, quivered and went out. Utter dark fell in the silo. Through the dark the curses and laughter echoed.

The men recoiled, horror-stricken. Clinging to each other, they stumbled down the pile of ensilage, and to the door. To the blessed freedom of the wintry night.

"Gawd A'mighty!" quavered one, his face twitching. "He's went plumb crazy! Run fer Dr. Abbott!"

"I—I dassen't go alone, Ed! *You* come, too!"

Thus quaking to the roots of their souls they ran through the snow for help. And as they ran a horrible voice echoed dully

through the blackness of the silo of the barn:

"I got him, anyhow! He's *somewheres* here—if I—could only find him. A dead man can't—he can't—*can't*—"

IV.

THE old newspaper, wrapped round the "hand-out" that a good wife had given the hobo at a Connecticut back door, furnished that knight of the road a few minutes' literary diversion.

Seated by a little fire of chips alongside the railroad, in the afternoon sunshine of late April, he read the paper as he leisurely devoured the good wife's meat and bread.

All at once he grinned, with narrowing eyes that watered rheumily.

"Well, by the livin' jing!" he grunted. "That must be *him!* John W. Pownall—that *is* him!"

With keenest interest and enjoyment he reread the article, then glanced at the date-line of the paper.

"Two months ago, huh? An' nutty! An' in the nut-foundry at East Bridgewater. Incurable! I allus thought the squirrels 'd git him if he didn't watch out!"

Ruminatively, the hobo pondered. He swallowed the last of his snack, wiped his unshaven lips on his sleeve, and produced part of a cigarette from a formless pocket of his black coat. He lit the cigarette with a blazing chip, and inhaled smoke. His mind worked but slowly. He was conscious now of mingled pain and pleasure.

"There goes all my show of ever gittin' that thousand," he cogitated. "But I'm even with him fer this, anyhow." He rubbed an ugly scar on his thick skull.

"That was *some* wallop, believe me! Almost knocked me out. Lucky fer me I had sense enough fer to lay still an' do the 'possum act. What?"

He smoked out the fag, and tossed it into the fire, then laughed with ugly tusks.

"Nutty!" said he. "*Sure,* he's nutty now, an' he must o' been then. A guy what 'd bean a feller just fer asking fer a thousand must o' been plumb bugs.

"Gee! I got out of it easy, I'm thinkin'. If he hadn't of went outa that there silo, an' gave me a chanst t' slip off me boots an' pussy-foot it up that ladder inta that haymow, an' lay there all day till I could make my getaway that night, God—he sure might o' bumped me off!

"Lucky, I calls it. Lucky! Lucky Ruggles, that's *me!*"

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A MODERN LEGEND OF THE MOSS-ROSE

A ROSEBUD leaned across the fence
One morning bright and fair
To view the road and take a peep
At people passing there.
It saw a lady in a blouse
Yclept the peek-a-boo,
And blushed so vividly it still
Retains the lovely hue.

Then next appeared a sweet young thing
Of more than twenty-one,
Whose scanty skirt for brevity
Could never be outdone,
And o'er its petals softly pink,
With dews of silver wet,
The rosebud drew the veil of moss
Which it is wearing yet.

Minna Irving

The Guide to Happiness

Part II

by Max Brand

Author of "Tiger," "The Night Horseman," "The Untamed," "Clung," "Trailin'," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

JOHN SCOVIL, a New York millionaire, goes West with his anemic, neurasthenic, but superlatively beautiful daughter, Nancy, for the sake of the girl's health. But in the West Nancy spends all her time eating and sleeping. She will not ride, shoot, hunt, play or work. In despair Scovil appeals to his friend Benson and is overheard by young Jerry Aiken, who believes that women and horses respond to the same kind of treatment. Jerry offers his services to Scovil as his daughter's trainer, and after explaining his plan is engaged. He in turn hires two ruffians, Red Mack and Pete the Runt, to assist him in abducting Nancy and her father. He pays them in advance and therefore they try to double-cross him by robbery. The discovery that they have stolen Mexican money from him, and that he may be kidding them, makes them decide to go to work. Red Mack and Pete subdue Scovil, and Jerry enters Nancy's room to gaze in astonishment upon the beautiful girl he had never seen before.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SLEEPER WAKES.

YES, there she slept, with one arm beneath her head, smiling in her sleep. On the table in the corner burned a lamp with the wick turned very low, yet casting enough light to show the girl to him plainly, and all the curving graces of her beauty. Yet no gleam of admiration came in the eyes of Jerry. He chuckled loudly as he shook her by the shoulder—no easy touch, but such a touch as the hay-press foreman uses to rouse his men at 4 A.M. of a weary morning. The smile left her lips, but her eyes did not unclose.

"Wake up!" shouted the bandit, and, seizing her by the hand, he tugged her to a sitting posture on the bed.

She stared at him, her eyes wrinkling with a great yawn. Absent-mindedly, she rubbed the place on her wrist where his grasp had fallen. Presently a glimmer of surprise lighted her face.

"Who are you?" she asked, drawing the coverlet closer about her shoulders.

"I'm the fellow who's going to take you and your dad for a ride."

"Oh," she murmured through a ready yawn. "Is that it? Tell dad I'm not interested in riding."

She lay back on the cushions.

"But I am," said Jerry Aiken. "You're not going to ride because you want to, but because you have to; and the same holds for your father."

"A—kidnaper!" she cried softly.

"Whatever you want to call it. You've got five minutes. Here are some togs. They're for you to wear. Hop into 'em, and be damned quick about it. I've no

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 13.

time to waste on you. Five minutes, or we'll take you as you are."

"Take me where?" The girl sat up again in the bed, rested her chin on her palm, and blinked a sleepy inquiry at him.

"Where we please," frowned Jerry. "I'll turn my back while you dress. At the end of five minutes if you haven't these clothes on, I'll throw a tarp over you and take you as you are!"

With that he turned away and took out his watch.

No protests, no screams, no feminine tears and exclamations. His head fairly rang with the silence. Presently he heard the rustling of clothes behind him, which announced that she was dressing.

Then a little cry: "Men's clothes!" After a moment: "Rose would give her teeth to be in these trousers."

"Your five minutes is nearly up. Have you anything on?"

"The trousers and the shirt. Why?"

He turned. The whip-cord riding trousers were still unlaced at the bottom, and the blue flannel shirt was open at the throat. Above it appeared a flushed face and bright eyes under a great mop of dark, tangled hair.

"Look here!" exclaimed Jerry Aiken. "This isn't a masquerade party. Hurry up! Jump into the rest of your clothes."

But she was viewing herself with side-glances in the mirror.

"Where did you get my measurements?" she asked. "This is a perfect fit!"

"Good!"

He caught her by the shoulders and plumped her down in the chair. With one hand he gripped her left ankle tightly; with the other he caught up one of the riding boots he had brought and drew it on. He duplicated the work with the other boot, caught up the sombrero, and jerked it into place upon her head.

"The time's up!" said Jerry. "Come along!"

And he dragged her to her feet.

"But," cried the girl, "you don't mean to say that you're going to take me without so much as a single trunk? Without any of the necessities of life?"

She had taken all that went before so calmly that his heart relented. He released the wrist by which he was drawing her toward the door.

"What d' you want? Two minutes to pack one bag—that bag yonder. Where's your stuff?"

"All through that chest of drawers."

"I'll run through it."

He ran to the chest and jerked the drawers out onto the floor.

"Turn up the lamp!"

"She obeyed, and he dumped the first drawer load upon the floor.

"No, no!" cried Nancy. "I'll need every bit of that drawer full!"

"Bunk!" grunted Jerry. "Silks! What good are silks in the mountains?" He heaved a whole armful of priceless lingerie toward the window. "And this drawer? My dear, these aren't clothes—they're fine feathers. What is there that you *have* to have?"

"Very well," she sighed. "If I can only take the necessities, let me pick them out."

He watched her with interest; and she worked now actively enough. Into the little bag which he had designated she transferred one by one from the bureau little vials, with peculiarly wrought stoppers, small boxes, tiny cans and glass jars whose colored contents varied through rose and blue to pure white. And from the drawers below she brought out articles of dress—filmy, transparent, edged with ruffles or lace.

"Time's up!" snapped her abductor.

She closed the bag and locked it. Then, catching sight of herself in the mirror again, she changed the angle of the sombrero, and did something mysterious to the broad brim.

"I've been perfectly foolish," said Nancy, "to keep away from broad brims so long. Don't you think so?"

And she turned her lazy smile upon Jerry Aiken.

"Out through the door!" he commanded, frowning.

"Carry that bag carefully, please," she pleaded.

"I carry it?" thundered Jerry. "Carry it yourself if you want it. And now start on the jump."

She obeyed without a word, but at the door she stopped short and then burst into a peal of clear laughter. For she saw her father lying, wriggling slightly, under the full weight of Pete the Runt, whose swarthy face scowled back at her.

"Ready!" called Jerry.

Pete the Runt stood up and brought the millionaire to his feet by the simple expedient of fixing a hand on the collar of his shirt and giving one prodigious jerk. It landed Scovil, gasping and blinking, on his feet.

"Nancy!" he roared. "Stop that laughter, or I'll—"

"You houn' dog!" cut in Red Mack, who had been staring agape upon the lovely vision of Nancy Scovil at the door. "Is that the way you talk to a lady? Shut up, or I'll jam my fist down your throat.'

"Young man," stuttered Scovil to Jerry, "this has gone too far. I warn you solemnly that if you go another step in the matter the full vigor of the law shall be called in to—"

"Kick that old fool out of the room and throw him on a horse," ordered Aiken calmly.

Unfortunately the mind of Pete the Runt was to the last degree literal. He started the millionaire on his way by a thrust from behind with his hand, but he furnished the chief impulsion through a tremendous swing of his stanch right leg. The foot landed with a thudding impact, and John Scovil shot toward the door. Here Red Mack awaited him, and with a vicious grin caught him and hustled him out into the dark of the night.

"Now you," said Jerry, "follow 'em, and step smart!"

There, before the house, stood five horses with the reins hanging over their heads, and behind them were two pack-mules, low-headed, flopping their awkward ears at the strange procession which tumbled out of the house.

"But," protested Nancy, as she saw her father lifted bodily and flung into a saddle, "are we to—"

"Get into the saddle and talk afterward," he commanded.

She obeyed without a word, and with surprising agility. In an instant the cavalcade was off at a swinging gallop.

"But," panted Nancy, reining her mount a little closer to Jerry's, "I don't see why —you didn't let me—have—my nap out—before the party started!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLIGHT.

RED MACK led the way. In the light breeze of the night the brim of his ancient sombrero flopped into a dozen queer and constantly changing forms, and sometimes it seemed as if they followed a Hermes, with winged helmet. John Scovil, now fallen into silence, rode at the side of his daughter immediately behind Red; Jerry Aiken followed close thereafter, and the rear guard consisted of Pete the Runt, who drove two pack-mules ahead of him.

Their speed regulated the gait for the rest of the party, and since the mules moved according to ideas of their own the cavalcade one moment trotted, one moment walked, one moment galloped. To be sure, Pete the Runt did what he could to moderate the thoughts of the pack-mules. Partly he persuaded them with a blacksnake, which hummed and snapped every few minutes, and now and again, in his expert hand, drew grunts even from the time hardened mules. For, as Pete the Runt, used to say: "It ain't how you hit a mule; it's where you hit 'em. They all got one tender spot."

He knew the tender spots of this pair perfectly. For during five years these two had sweated and grunted and labored at the behest of Red Mack and Pete the Runt, so that Pete knew every hair in their scraggy tails, every angle of their pot-bellied forms, every light in their evil eyes. Very evil indeed were those eyes.

No mule is peculiarly amiable, but a mule on a trail in the mountain desert loses even his philosophic calm. A sort of feminine spite and hate consumes him. And the silent bitterness of ten thousand years of persecution sets a green demon point of fire in either eye.

Pete the Runt kept up a steady fire of

monologue leveled at the pair; the loveliest woman in the world could never inspire so much eloquence in Pete as the whims of his two pack-mules.

" Boomer," he would roar, " you damned old fool, that ain't a hunk of rock-salt you're aimin' to chew; it's plain stone, and it 'll break even your mean heart if you swaller it. Git on! Hey, Bill, damn them knock-knees of yours, if you don't git back in the trail I'll bust you wide open. I never see such a fool mule.

" I'd rather carry the pack myself than argue with you, Bill. You got more sense than any man in the party, and you use it all up bein' mean. Bill, if I had as much brains as you've got I'd go and be a Mexican or a sheep-herder, or something low and mean like that. Take that!

" Oh, I know right enough that you was born this way, but it's partly the way you've educated yourself. And I'm goin' to add something to your education, Bill. I'm goin' to give you a regular college course in manners this trip, if I got to wear out six blacksnakes and my arm doing it. Take that, and that! And they's more comin'. That's jest a promise of the rest. Don't turn your snake-head around and look at me like that! Oh, I know right enough how you hate me. Maybe you'll wear me out in the long run, but I'll keep fightin' you up to the last minute. Take that! My God, did ever anybody see such a contrary mule as that? Git on!"

So he ran on. Sometimes his voice fell to a philosophic mumble. Sometimes it rose and rang from wall to wall of the valley, for they had entered a dark ravine which split with double blackness the gloomy side of the mountains. So dull was the gloom that the flapping hat of Red Mack in the lead was barely perceptible to those in the rear, and sometimes it dipped out of sight entirely in a thicker sea of shadow. The sharp cracking of shod hoofs and the thunder of Pete's voice echoed from side to side of this ravine, bounding up, repeated over and over again, to where the jagged lips of the ravine gaped against the sky, steel blue, beautifully arched, and lighted with innumerable points.

Some of these hung low and yellow, literally brushing against the mountains, but others burned paler, higher up, and last of all were faint white, twinkling glimmers at a distance incalculable.

They climbed steadily up the boulder-strewn floor of the ravine, until they broke out of the deadly darkness onto the floor of a high plateau at whose distant edges the mountains sprang up again, ghostly pyramids against the horizon. They had really cut through the first range of mountains.

Jerry could see the girl with a degree of clearness. The procession began to gallop as they reached the sharp down-pitch of a slope, and he saw that Nancy rode well.

There are few things which try the powers of a rider so much as a hand-gallop down a grade; usually there is much flopping of shoulders and arms, and a great deal of swinging about in the saddle; but Nancy Scovil bounced not at all.

Here and there, winding among the rocks of the slope, the sure-footed cattle-pony picked its way like an expert football player dodging his course through a broken field, but Nancy swayed gracefully with the rapid alterations of the pony. Never once, so far as Jerry could judge, did she pull leather, and the rhythm of her riding pleased him like the rhythm of music. Her father, good rider though he was, grunted and swore at the jolting gallop, but when they struck out on the level again Jerry heard the girl singing softly to herself.

Singing while she was being borne away she knew not whither, strange men leading her to a destination and a purpose unknown! Jerry swore gently to himself.

Now the gait settled to a steady dog-trot. Pete the Runt had by this time convinced the mules that they might as well reconcile themselves to the inevitable, and they lowered their heads and jogged with grunts at Jerry's heels. Silence fell over the party. Even the monologue of Pete the Runt died away to occasional single oaths, and these muffled.

It may have been weariness which stopped all tongues. It may have been the awe of the solemn mountains about them, or the great, gray arch of the sky overhead; but there was not a sound except the scuffle of hoofs through gravel, or the sharp

ring of iron against a loose rock, the panting of the horses, and the inevitable creak of straining or chafing leather. Always the dog-trot, except when a steep slope compelled them to a walk, or when a sudden down-slope sent them into a brief, lurching gallop; and so the miles rolled back behind them, and the mountains through which they had first passed became glimmering ghosts far, far behind.

Then Red Mack held up his arm in the gloom, and the cavalcade halted. It was a solemn moment, for reasons they could not name, that instant of deadly silence while Red Mack kept his arm stiffly above his head. And then they heard a musical and stealthy sound. It was like a human whisper at first, rising and falling suddenly, as if in distant, murmured conversation; but presently they knew that it was the noise of running water. Red Mack dropped his arm and turned straight for the sound until they came to the side of a little stream of water.

It was very narrow—hardly a step across—and so shallow that the rocks of the bottom glinted even in the starlight. Far away, on either side into the night, the silver surface stretched and went out in a dwindling chalk-mark. Red Mack swung from the saddle; Pete the Runt was tugging at the ropes of the packs. Jerry slipped to the ground and approached the girl.

"Here, you!" he ordered. "Hop off your horse. That's a saddle—not a rocking chair."

"But," argued Nancy, "it's the only place I see where I can sit."

"Sit on the ground," suggested Jerry harshly. "Off with you!"

She turned her head, cast one long glance at him, and then said to John Scovil: "Dad, are you going to sit your horse quietly and let a man talk to me like that?"

"He'll answer for it!" cried her father hotly. "He'll answer for this and for a lot of other things, or I—"

"You!" snapped Jerry. "Close your face, or I'll put a gag in it. As for you—" This was to Nancy, and he used actions instead of words. There was a rock beside her horse, and upon this Aiken stepped, slipped his hands under the pits of her arms, and half lifted, half dragged her to the ground.

He released her before she had quite regained her balance, and she staggered several steps away. Jerry went to her father, who had stepped from the saddle.

"Now," he said rapidly, lowering his voice so as to keep it from carrying to any of the others, "it's up to you to keep quiet and let me do the talking. Understand?"

Following, perhaps unconsciously, the example of Aiken, Scovil, answered softly: "Young man, I am helpless in the hands of you and your two ruffians. But this is not the end of the story. You'll pay for it, by the eternal! I'm a mass of bruises where that brute—ah—sat upon me, and if it takes me to the end of time I'll—"

"Keep quiet and do what I tell you to do," cut in Jerry. "You've made me a business proposition, and now you'll keep it."

"It was a mad idea in the first place," said Scovil. "And the manner in which you've carried out the crazy scheme has destroyed the contract utterly. There is only one thing for you to do. Turn the heads of the horses back toward Comanche Bend, and, when we get there, clear out of the country. That's the one safe bet for you, my young friend!"

Jerry laid a strong hand upon Scovil's shoulder.

"Listen to me," he said, "and let every word soak in to bedrock. You've started this party, and I'm going to see it finished. It's a habit with me to put through anything I begin. I'm going to take you with us. If you'll come of your own accord, well and good. If you won't, I'll have you tied on the back of your horse and driven. Don't forget it!"

He turned on his heel and strode away.

CHAPTER X.

THE TEST.

TWO men working with absolute precision and in perfect harmony can accomplish astonishing results, and by the time Jerry finished his brief conversa-

tion with Scovil he found that Red Mack and Pete the Runt had already undone the packs, cared for their mules and horses, and were even now laying down the bed-rolls. He began to direct at once.

"Your bed is over here, Scovil; and here's yours, girl. Time to turn in, both of you."

Nancy had not stirred from the spot to which she staggered when Aiken dragged her from the horse. Now she protested in her usual quiet voice. "But where do I undress?"

"Bah!" cut in Jerry. "Pull off your boots and roll up in the blankets. Do you think we carry along a dressing-room with a camping outfit? Hurry up—you have work to do to-morrow."

"Work?" she echoed blankly.

Her father gradually worked his way closer. Off to a little distance Red and the Runt worked over their own bunks, and their lantern cast a dim, flickering light over the group; yet there was a sufficient illumination to show Jerry the unmistakable signs of interest in the face of Scovil.

"Work? Certainly!" repeated Jerry. "Don't you know that every one on the trail follows the Indian custom? The women do the work, and you'll have your hands full with four men to take care of. Roll in; you'll need your sleep."

Something like a muffled chuckle came from John Scovil; his daughter, after an instant's pause, walked deliberately to her bed and then felt of it carefully.

"It's too rocky and pebbly underneath," she said, "and too hard. I could never sleep in that."

"What will you do?" asked Aiken.

"I'll sit up."

"You will not. Off with those boots and into those blankets, or I'll roll you up in them with your boots on."

A dim light came in the eyes of Nancy Scovil.

"Dad," she said, a little ring snapping into her voice, "are you going to allow this —fellow—to lay hands on me?"

A singular sound exploded in the throat of Scovil. It surely could not have been a choked laugh!

"My dear," he said, with a gesture of resignation, "you certainly see that I am helpless in the hands of this ruffian."

"Speed, Miss Nancy—that's the thing," insisted Aiken, and he snapped his fingers.

She drew herself up.

"This is both absurd and impossible," she said coldly. "I shall sit on this rock to-night, and go to bed if I see fit. That is final."

"Quite wrong," announced Jerry. "It's not even the beginning. I'll count to three. If you don't start for bed by that time, I'll help you on your way."

"You mean you would dare to compel me—by force?"

"One—"

"Dad, if you're a man, you'll stand between him and me!"

"My dear, I am unarmed. How can I protect you from the scoundrel?"

"Two—"

"If I were only a man—for a single second," murmured Nancy Scovil.

"Three—"

"You dare not!"

But Jerry, with neither mirth nor anger, swept her suddenly from the rock, and in the most businesslike manner possible carried her to the bed which he had designated as hers, laid her down, and then rolled her in the blankets as one might bundle up a carpet.

He had expected a struggle, from that light in her eyes as he approached her, but the moment he lifted her she became a dead weight, unmoving either of hand or foot. And a dead weight he laid down upon the blankets, and a dead weight he rolled unceremoniously over and over till she was swathed like a papoose. And last of all, he found himself staring down into blank, emotionless eyes which looked through and beyond him—perhaps to the unconcerned stars above.

"Good night," said Jerry Aiken, "and when you hear me call in the morning jump out of those blankets—on the jump!"

She made no answer. Her face was that of a Hindu devotee contemplating Nirvana. Jerry Aiken turned away, when something in the expression of John Scovil arrested him. It was the slow beginning of a vast smile which spread and spread until the

eyes of the big man literally went out, and the wrinkles of silent joy ran out and outward like the waves around the stone dropped into still water.

"Aiken!" called Scovil softly.

He approached the older man.

"My boy," said Scovil, "I've an apology to offer. I've been blind—sulky like a small youngster when some one steps on his toes—but now my eyes are opened. Jerry, you're a great man!"

And his large, fat hand fairly swallowed the lean brown fingers of Aiken.

"I knew you'd come to in time," chuckled Jerry. "Sorry I had to let the boys muss you up a bit when we started, but I couldn't let them see that it was a fixed up job."

"Hereafter," murmured Scovil, with an almost tearfully earnest voice, "I follow where you lead—without question. Jerry, I didn't think it was possible! But I've seen it done!"

"Forget it," said Jerry. "Turn in. This is only the beginning. And don't mind it if I bark at you once in a while tomorrow."

"But what's the use of all this if she never fights back? She has no more spirit than a spaniel!"

"Mr. Scovil," answered Jerry, "I'm like death. All I need is time." And he went toward the bunks of the two guides.

They had their blankets laid down almost touching each other, and now they were both half in bed, their boots standing near by, while they sat up and smoked the farewell pipe of the day. The lantern smoked fraternally between them. Two pairs of solemn, disparaging eyes stared gloomily up at Jerry as he approached; but he perched himself jauntily on a rock near by and smiled at them.

"Well, boys," he said, "you've done well. The party is started as smoothly as oil."

No answer.

"And," continued Jerry, "if things keep running like this, you may be in for a sizable bonus when we're done."

The heads of Mack and Pete turned to each other; silent glances were exchanged; but not a sound from either.

"And so," concluded Jerry, "good night to you both."

He rose, but Red Mack called after him in a guarded voice. He turned back.

"I got jest one thing to say," said Mack deliberately.

"Which is this," continued Pete the Runt. "Be as hard as you want on the fat gent, but don't muss up that gal again. That's all!"

But Jerry waved the warning away.

"Pure bunk!" he insisted. "That's what she needs. She's like a mustang, boys. Needs the curb and the spur at the same time. Oh, I know women. They're an open book, if you know the language they're written in."

"Then—" began Mack, with some heat, but Pete the Runt cut in with his deep voice:

"Let it go. Only, my frien', before you get through with this, maybe you'll want to write a new endin' onto your book on women. S' long!"

"If you have any foot-notes to offer," said Jerry airily, "I'll be glad to use 'em. S' long."

When he was gone Pete the Runt muttered in a voice like a groan: "How long are we goin' to stand it, Mack?"

"I got cramps all up and down my right arm from keepin' from hittin' him," answered Red Mack gloomily. "Did you see the way he picked up that girl?"

"And the way he rolled her in them blankets like a sack of oats?"

"Funny she didn't make no sound," mused Mack. "Maybe the tenderfoot is right. Maybe she *does* need to be manhandled that way."

"Ugh!" Pete the Runt shook his vast shoulders with suppressed emotion. "You don't know nothin' about women, Mack. Most like it's your face that keeps you away from 'em—I dunno. But no lady wouldn't holler nor make a noise when she seen it wasn't no use. What d' you think Miss Scovil is—a dance-hall girl? Nope! She's got blue blood, I'll say!"

"And she knows a gentleman when she sees one," added Red Mack. "When that low houn' pulled her offen her hoss she turned right around and looked at me!"

"That so?" murmured the Runt.

And he slipped down with a chuckle into his blankets. He knew perfectly well that that glance of appeal had been sent to him, not to Mack. What girl would waste a second glance on the ugly face of Mack? But if the poor fellow didn't understand, why make him miserable? Yet the Runt chuckled himself to sleep over the absurdity.

CHAPTER XI.

DESERTION.

IT was rarely indeed that more than one idea possessed the brain of Nancy Scovil; the present ever swallowed up both past and future, so, as she lay in her blankets on this night, she forgot all the excitement of the abduction, and all the cruel and selfish indifference of her father, and all the frank brutality of Jerry Aiken.

She forgot all these things because of the pebbles beneath the blankets. At first they were hardly noticeable, but after a moment or so the hardness began to work through, as though each rock were impelled by a separate and malignant force. With a good deal of difficulty she twisted over on her side to seek greater comfort in the new position, but a new pebble at once jabbed her in the ribs. She wiggled up a little into comparative comfort. But it did not last. Separate hardnesses began to pry at her knee, at her hip, at her shoulder. It called for a continual shifting.

Finally the insistent annoyance brought back to her the picture of the grinning, happy Jerry Aiken; a little pang went through her and brought in its trail a vague sort of desire to wipe out the fellow's smile. But the picture of Jerry did not persist. She turned upon her back, and all the wide, star-touched dimness of the heavens fell like a coolness about her face.

One of the mules snorted; the familiar snore of her father commenced fitfully and then swung out upon a deep serenade. She knew by dread experience that it was deadly unless one could fall asleep before that snoring began. But presently she found herself looking up among the stars again. They tangled into odd, geometric figures, vaster than thought; triangles with points ten billion miles apart, and the cool peace slid down upon her soul.

She forgot the snoring of her father; the crisp air of the night bit sharply at her cheeks, her throat was cold. The water whispered reassuringly near by, and then, in a wave of star-lighted darkness, profound sleep moved over her.

"Only an instant, it seemed, before a voice ran in upon her dreams, ringing:

"Haloo! All up! All up! Haloo!"

Her eyes opened; the sky above her was a vast, transparent crystal with delicate pink and rose hues buried in the glass. She sat up in her blankets.

"All up! All up!" repeated the voice.

Then she saw him coming, swinging up the slope from the creek, his shirt open at the throat, busily plying a towel over his tangled hair. A cold plunge, and on a morning like this!

She grew suddenly and shudderingly aware of a chill numbness which chained her limbs from head to toe. A cold plunge! The thought stabbed her. Then she grew aware of a thousand little aches and pains. Her shoulders and hips and knees ached as if she had been beaten.

"You there—Nancy!" called that tormenting voice. "Out of your blankets!"

Her father, with tousled hair, sat on his bed pulling on his boots. Red Mack and Pete the Runt were already caring for their horses and the mules. She stood up, dizzy, and shook the blankets from about her. All the rest were gloomy faces, in tune with her own feelings, all except Jerry Aiken, and now he burst into a song. Song! It was like a blow in the face.

"All right," continued that demoniacally cheerful voice. "Run down to the water and have a wash. Then trot back here on the double. Breakfast in five minutes!"

Breakfast! A pang of hunger thrust her through, and with moistening mouth she hobbled down to the creek with her toilet bag in her hand. She bent over a pool of clear water, expecting a swollen-eyed, pale ghost to stare back at her; instead, she saw rosy cheeks and almost artificially bright eyes. Very strange!

Her fingers grew numb as she washed in that snow water, but as she combed her hair into some semblance of order the blood began to thump hotly through her veins. The most fragrant perfume she had ever scented in her life blew down to her—it was from the camp-fire, where the coffee already steamed, and Nancy Scovil almost ran toward it.

She was stiff indeed, but the stiffness was already beginning to disappear; every instant the freshness of the morning air drew deeply down into her lungs. Her father had picked up a hatchet and was starting toward a dead stump not far away.

"Wait!" commanded Aiken. "Give that hatchet to the girl and let her chop the wood. An old man like you and still working for your daughter? Not on this trail, Scovil! Hey, you, pick up that hatchet and hustle us an armful of wood. Hop to it!"

Her father turned upon her a smile brighter than the rising sun and tossed the hatchet so that it kicked up the sand at her feet.

"Good idea, Jerry," he nodded. "All right, Nan. Rustle the wood before the fire goes out."

She looked at the rough handle of the hatchet; she looked at the delicate, pink palm of her hand; she stared dumbly at her father; what on earth could it mean? Work?

"I haven't the slightest idea how wood can be chopped," murmured Nancy. "You ought to know that, dad."

"Right enough," nodded John Scovil. "I'll teach you how it's done."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," cut in the tyrant. "If she can't cut wood, she can't eat. No work, no food, in this camp."

Nancy looked strangely at Jerry. She picked up the hatchet, but as some sense of the indignity came home to her she threw it down again.

She said quietly to the leader of the band:

"Mr. Aiken, you have the brute power to abduct us and bring us here; but you have not the power to make me work—like a common ranch hand!"

"Look here!" said the Runt darkly to Jerry. "This has got—"

"Do you hear that?" cut in Jerry in a sad voice, and he shook his head solemnly. "Do you see what you've brought your daughter to, Scovil? Proud and idle! What's she good for? I ask you that! To spend another man's money. Look at her! She won't even work for her breakfast—even a common tramp has better sense than that. All right, Scovil, go ahead and get the wood, but your daughter goes without food till noon."

She turned haughtily away and sauntered down to the edge of the water, where she sat on a rock and tried to enjoy the colors of dawn reflected before her. It was not possible that they would allow him to carry out his inhuman threat. No food until noon? No food for a thousand years, he might as well have said, for that spreading hollowness within her would be fatal long before. But it was all a bluff; in a moment he would send one of them to bring her back.

Then, as a wave of sullen resentment boiled up in her, she determined that she would of her own accord utterly refuse to touch food even when it was urged upon her. That was it—a hunger strike! They dared not murder her, and to escape from that they would have to bring her back to some town quickly. And she pictured herself carried, hollow-cheeked, empty-eyed, into some village, at the very door of death. She would do it, if only to spite that unspeakable Jerry.

But, no, her father would intercede for her. That was plain. He would, at least, smuggle food for her, but work she could not and she would not! The strength of her new resolve spread a pleasant warmth through her.

And then—she would not believe it at first—a sound of singing boomed down to her from the camp-fire. She listened—she shook her head and canted her ear to make sure. It was beyond all doubt the voice of her father. He sang while his daughter starved beneath his very eyes!

"It's no use, Jerry." John Scovil stood beside his horse after breakfast, with the

cavalcade ready to depart. "She's as stubborn as the very devil. It's her only strength. You can't break her will. She'll sit down there by the water till she dies, and never ask you for a crust of bread."

"Will she?" Jerry non-committally busied himself with his girths.

"Besides," went on Scovil, "Mack and Pete begin to look rather black at you. I don't think they'll stand it if you treat her too roughly."

"Hm!" remarked Jerry.

"Besides," Scovil frowned, "there is a limit to all things, and you've gone too far!"

"You said that last night," answered Jerry.

"By heavens," cried the other, "I mean it, man! I can't let the child starve herself to death!"

"You'll stand more than this before we're through," said Jerry grimly. "There is some flint in every one, and I'm going to keep hammering that girl till I get a spark from her."

Scovil hesitated a moment.

"If you don't watch your two men, you are liable to strike a spark that will burn you to a cinder," he suggested. "But that is your business."

"It is," responded Jerry curtly. He raised his voice. "Hey, you, Nancy. Are you going with us, or are you going to stay here?"

No answer.

"This is no beaten trail," he continued. "There'll be no other party along to pick you up. But stay here and starve if you will!"

No answer.

"All right, boys, start!"

"By God!" muttered the Runt to Mack. "I think the yaller houn' really means to ride away and leave the gal here to die!"

"Give him a try," suggested Mack, his lips twisting, wolflike, back from his teeth. "And if he really rides right off from her—well, that's all the ridin' he'll ever do!"

And, instinctively, his right hand wandered toward the butt of his forty-five.

The procession formed and started at a slow walk.

There was no further call to the girl, but the creaking of the saddle-leather shouted to her with a voice louder than any human accent.

She looked up. Before her stretched the cruel desert, and at its verge the naked, blue mountains, scores of miles away. The sun was still young and comparatively feeble, but every instant its heat increased with a promise of that furnace intensity which would scorch the sun toward midday. And not even a shrub under which she could lie to escape. It would be like burning at the stake, but more terrible, more slow. Yet—it could not be that they would leave her!

The creak of the saddle-leather grew louder, louder, and then comenced to fade away. She stood up; she cast one look around her.

"Wait! Wait!" cried Nancy. "I'm coming!"

But the slow walk broke into a dog-trot which was hardly any faster; Nancy commenced to run frantically.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCERNING INSANITY.

CERTAINLY they did not slacken the pace at which they traveled because she was chasing them so frantically; yet neither did they increase that dog-trot, and only one head turned to watch her. It was her father's rubicund countenance which faced her, and she came to a sudden halt, frozen with astonishment, when she saw that he was actually smiling—nay, grinning with inexplicable joy!

It was only an instant that she paused in her bewilderment, for during that precious instant the cavalcade jogged on several more yards into the lead. Then she began to run in real earnest; a cold, sharp fear had caught at her heart—like the dread of insanity.

What had come to her father? It was sufficiently strange that he should have calmly submitted to leave his daughter behind him in the desert, though that might have been explained through his natural dread of that laughing demon, Jerry Aiken, but that John Scovil could actually grin in

such a terrible moment was beyond conception.

So Nancy Scovil drew a deep breath and started running like the wind. She had never dreamed that her legs could carry her so swiftly, so untiringly, so surely over smooth and rough. The wind of her running whipped the hat from her head; her hair tumbled down; her breath came hot and fast, and tears of excitement dimmed her eyes.

Vaguely, through a mist, she was aware of John Scovil in his new madness, reeling to and fro in his saddle, in eminent peril of a fall, while he held his shaking sides and the roar of his laughter blew back to her. But at last she had regained the company, passed Pete the Runt in the rear, and now trotted, panting, beside her horse, which Aiken led.

Through her bewilderment cut his relentless voice: "Let go of that stirrup! Get back with you and pick up your hat. Do you think I'll let you throw away my good money on sombreros?"

She released the stirrup and stood still, a sudden desire to take him by the throat almost mastering her. But there he sat in his saddle, high above her and grinning complacently down. The fresh roar of her father's laughter thundered at her ear, and once more the company trotted past her.

There was nothing for it but to obey. Luckily the hat lay only a few steps behind her; she regained it in a moment, and again raced until, almost exhausted, she reached her horse once more.

"Stop the horse!" she cried frantically to Jerry. "Don't you see I can't get on?"

"Climb on or stay behind," said Aiken, still grinning. "It makes no difference to me."

Desperation gave her strength. She clapped the sombrero more firmly upon her head, seized the horn of the saddle, and dragged herself up; but when she was almost to safety her arms gave way as if she had been paralyzed above the elbows. Down she came, and nearly stumbled under the feet of the horse.

Her teeth flashed as she cast a glance toward Aiken—the grinning demon—and then she essayed again. Perhaps hate gave her added power; at any rate, she managed to swing herself up, and a moment later her leg swung into place; then a black haze, from the exhaustion, swept across her eyes; she had to seize the pommel of the saddle and cling blindly to keep from falling from her place. And when she raised her head the voice of her father boomed near her:

"Circus stuff, Nan! Ha, ha, ha! I've never seen a better exhibition of running and—ha, ha, ha—jumping. Wouldn't have believed it of you!"

"Very graceful, too," murmured Aiken.

"It was, especially when her hat blew off."

"And when her hair came down."

"And when she ran—"

"Like Atalanta—a regular new Atalanta!"

They rode on either side of her, and when she looked from one to the other she was met by derisive laughter; tears veiled the sight of Nancy Scovil, but when her eyes cleared again she was aware that Red Mack had turned in the saddle and was watching Jerry Aiken with a somber interest. His glance turned to her, and she felt the electric sympathy of his look. It was a marvelous stimulant.

Aiken, too, saw those plainly labeled glances. He fell back to the rear with Pete the Runt and beckoned Mack to join them. He came willingly enough, with a brow like a thunder-storm. They slackened their pace until they were well to the rear and out of hearing of the rest.

"My frien'," muttered Pete the Runt, and he fixed a glittering eye upon Aiken, "you come back here just in time. I was pretty near to coming up to have a talk with you."

"Runt," growled Red Mack, "you and me had got jest one and the same thought, then. I got a whole mouthful to spill to this gent."

Jerry observed them with a slightly thoughtful air. Plainly matters had come to a crisis. Red Mack's hand gripped his bridle-rein as though he were strangling a living thing; he slouched a little forward in the saddle, and his free hand was perpetually busy arranging and patting with soft touches the holster on his hip. Pete the

Runt, on the other hand, rode perfectly erect. His large nostrils quivered now and again like a hound on a scent, and his great jaw muscles bulged rhythmically as he held some passion in leash. Thunder-clouds rolled, manifestly, about the head of Aiken, and lightning was not far away.

"First," broke out Red Mack, and his jaw stood out like that of a bulldog as he spoke, "I got this to say. It ain't any long speech, but they's a pile o' meanin' in it for them as has got the brains to study it out. Partner"—he swung full around in the saddle—"I dunno what part of the country you come from, but I'll lay ten to one that it was a rotten part!"

"In the opinion of a great many people," replied Aiken blithely, "it is."

"I knowed it," went on Red Mack, "because the ideas you took out of it are rotten ideas! Around these parts—"

"Wait a minute," cut in Pete the Runt. "They ain't no use making a long yarn to a gent like him. I'll put it straight and snappy. Partner, they's jest two things I ain't goin' to stand by and watch. One is, when a feller begins beatin' a hoss up around the head."

"Very true," nodded Jerry. "A detestable practise. Moreover, I understand why horses are so tenderly treated out here in the desert. They're very useful."

"My frien'," said the Runt darkly, "which maybe it would be better if you didn't cut loose till I get through talkin' and you have all my ideas corraled inside your head."

But Jerry's smile was invincible.

"The other thing I can't stand to watch," pursued the Runt, as he automatically swerved his horse closer to that of Aiken, so that his own great bulk towered above that of the smaller man—"the other thing is, bad treatin' of a woman, bullyin', and things like that. I dunno where you was brung up, but I was brung up to *keep my hands off a girl.*"

His voice lowered with the last few words and his eyes filled with an evil light. On the other side of Jerry, Red Mack was moistening his lips with terrible eagerness, and his right hand glued itself about the butt of his gun.

But Jerry nodded to them both with grave understanding.

"You have my ideas absolutely," he said. "Women have to be handled with gloves out here—they're so scarce!"

Red Mack snorted. When he spoke his voice rose up the scale into an angry whine like that of an angered puma which has missed its kill.

"Maybe I'm blind," he said. "Maybe I ain't been seein' you treat that pore girl like a yaller dog all this while? But if I'm blind, partner, you ain't the doctor that can fix my eyes. Don't forget it!"

"Do you mean to say"—Jerry was apparently astonished—"that you fellows are making all this fuss about—that?"

And he indicated the girl who rode before them with a jerk of his hand.

Now, there is nothing so terrible to the man of the mountain desert as a sneer. He meets satire with satire, and mirth with mirth, and in his rage he fears no man; but the hidden deeps of scorn make his soul shrivel like a cut cactus on a hot day.

The heads of both Pete the Runt and Red Mack jerked to the front and stared inquiringly toward Nancy. She was putting up her hair. The sombrero dangled from the horn of the saddle, and under her flashing white hands the masses of black hair fell swiftly into a great braid, glittering in the sunlight, and as she rode, with her arms raised, her body gave with wonderful subtlety to the sway of the horse.

The two heads confronted Aiken, glowering and hostile again. In such wise two stern fronted bulls might turn together to crush a single foe.

"And what's wrong with her, I'd like to know?"

"What's wrong with her?" cried Jerry. Suddenly he threw up his hands and burst into hearty laughter. He seemed to have great difficulty in controlling his mirth.

"Do you mean to say that you haven't seen—after all these hours—what's wrong with her.

He was wiping the tears of his laughter away while he spoke; and crimson flooded the swarthy face of Pete the Runt. In his heart of hearts there was an almost religious desire to slay.

"Jest fool laughin' don't mean nothing," he asserted doggedly, and his glance sought Red Mack with a plea for arguments and assistance.

"An' her father sits by and laughs at the poor girl," cut in Red Mack. "Which it looks to me like a put up job on her, between you and old Scovil."

"A put up job?" chuckled Jerry. "If it's a put up job, he'll pay through the nose for the work!"

"And what," persisted Mack, "is the reason he seems so damn chummy with you? He don't seem no way put out because he was took away into the hills without no leave asked."

"I'll tell you why he's rather friendly," Jerry explained smoothly. "I was talking with him last night for a moment, and he began to tell me about his daughter. It seems that up to five years ago she was just like any other girl, when one day—"

He stopped short, and caught his hand up across his mouth.

"What was I saying!" he cried. "Boys, I forgot that I gave Scovil my word of honor that I wouldn't repeat the thing he told me. But watch her for yourself, and maybe you'll understand what I mean."

"Partner," asked Red Mack hungrily, "can't you gimme jest one word of a hint? Maybe I'm simple, but I don't see nothin' wrong with her."

"Between you and me," admitted Jerry frankly, "I didn't see anything wrong with her, either, until her father spoke to me last night. But now it's as clear as glass. I see right through her."

With corrugated brows Pete the Runt and Red Mack pondered.

"They ain't no doubt she's different," Red Mack thought aloud. "I seen that the minute I laid eyes on her."

"Me, too," nodded the Runt. "Anybody with eyes can see she ain't quite ordinary. But just where she's wrong—that's the only thing I can't quite make out."

"Gentlemen," said Jerry suddenly, "I *shall* give you just a hint. Have you noticed that she is very silent?"

"Ain't hardly said a word. Yep, I noticed that, all right."

"Except something impertinent?"

"She's sure sassy."

"And that she has a peculiar way of looking into the empty air as if she saw something in it?"

"Yes, yes! Go on," muttered Red Mack, edging closer.

"Well, gentlemen," said Jerry solemnly, "still waters run deep, as the old saying goes. And this poor girl, my friends—is not in her right mind."

"Now, what d' you mean by that?" queried the Runt.

"In a word," sighed Jerry, "Nancy Scovil is crazy!"

"Hell!" groaned Red Mack. "Nutty? Her?"

"Sees things in the air," muttered Pete the Runt, and he heaved a long and dolorous sigh. "My God, Mack, ain't it terrible?"

"Pretty as a picture," nodded Red Mack, "but I seen that something was wrong with her right off. She didn't have no comeback when she was manhandled. Say, if you'd treated my girl like that, she'd have turned loose a whole dictionary full of words at you and follered it up with bullets."

They both lowered their heads, and when Jerry examined them covertly a moment later he discovered that the face of each was lined with solemn thought.

CHAPTER XIII.

JERRY COOKS.

THE air was dull this day; not that the sky was overcast, for the rare clouds skirted swiftly from horizon to horizon, attesting the movement of the upper air-currents; but the crispness which is usual in the air of the mountain desert was lacking. The mountains were no longer brown-sided, clearly drawn giants, but instead, dim, wavering shapes of blue which lost themselves against the pale background.

They had intended to travel steadily until noon, but a little before that time they reached a spot designated and planned by Providence for campers. It was a little hollow whose sides cut away the rising

wind, and in the exact center of the depression lay a deep water-hole with straggling shrubbery stretched a short distance on all sides of it; and there was plenty of dead wood to make a quick, hot fire. So they dismounted to make the noonday halt.

A scene of bustle, with Jerry Aiken firing directions on all sides, Scovil taking care of his horse and Pete and Mack busy with the packs. But Nancy Scovil stretched herself with feline luxuriousness and sat down upon the sand to watch the work.

John Scovil looked at Jerry, and Jerry winked broadly in return and then walked briskly to the girl.

"Are you giving an afternoon tea?" he asked caustically. "Or are you sitting at the seashore watching the waves?"

The dark, soft eyes blinked sleepily up at him. They always made Jerry think of the dark eyes of a cat drowsing in the sun and dreaming, perhaps, of the last mouse it ate—or of the milk it would steal that night from the pantry. The gentle, lazy voice of Nancy Scovil answered:

"No; I've never had any save gentlemen at tea."

"The next gentleman you'll entertain is your horse," said Jerry curtly. "Would you leave him standing there for two hours with the saddle on his back?"

Her leisurely gaze still rested upon Aiken. It was hard to meet those inscrutable eyes, for she might be contemplating murder, or the dinner she was in danger of missing if she disobeyed—even as she had missed the breakfast—but now she rose and yawned delicately.

"I'll be very glad to take care of my horse," she said. "He seems to know his place."

No mockery in her glance as she said it; merely a straightforward statement of fact. She drew up the stirrup and tossed it across the saddle to get at the knot of the girth. She examined it carelessly.

"Hurry up!" snapped Aiken.

"Who saddled this horse?" inquired the girl.

"I did."

"I thought so," sighed Nancy.

"And what's wrong with it?"

"You could moor a ship with this knot."

"You can do your own saddling after this."

"Thank you."

She pulled the saddle from the back of her horse and swung it to the ground. It was a heavy saddle of Mexican work, built to carry any weight and stand the strain of infinite pitching by the most educated bronco on the range, yet the girl handled that mass of metal and leather as if it had been a feather.

Jerry Aiken watched her curiously as the slender shoulders swayed with the weight; there was strength in her, apparently, like the flexible endurance of fine spring-steel. If only those chains of contemptuous indifference could be snapped and the spirit inside her awakened!

He tossed a hatchet to her feet.

"Chop up a pile of wood for us. You'll find plenty of it over in that brush. Be careful to pick out the dead stuff."

There was, as always, the little pause before she obeyed, as if she were balancing thoughts vaguely in her mind.

"No work, no food," continued Jerry.

She leaned with another sigh and raised the hatchet and then sauntered slowly toward the brush about the water-hole.

"Victory!" whispered John Scovil to Jerry.

But Jerry answered, frowning: "Not yet. We've a devil of a long way to go before we waken her. Look at her. She moves like a machine that you start going by winding up a spring. What's up now?"

She had struck a single blow with the hatchet and now she stood thumbing the edge of the implement.

"Are you posing for a statue or playing a guitar?" Jerry called angrily.

"Give me another hatchet," yawned Nancy. "This one wouldn't cut water."

Jerry ground his teeth. He said fiercely: "I sharpened that myself."

"It looks like it," she answered.

"Are you or are you not going to chop that wood?"

"I am not. I'm going to break it."

And she made her word good by laying dead branches across a stone and snapping them into suitable lengths with the hammer-head of the hatchet. It was a ponderous

hatchet, with a blade as wide and long and massive as the head of a splitting ax, but Nancy swung it easily with one hand.

Jerry Aiken watched with puckering brows. He recovered himself, however, at the sight of Red Mack bestirring himself among the cooking utensils.

"Heh," he called, "don't rush at that cooking, Mack, because you had your chance this morning."

Red Mack turned slowly toward the guide to happiness.

"Well?" he demanded.

"We want something more than jaw exercise, Mack," pursued Jerry. "We had enough of that at breakfast. Now we need food."

"And what's wrong with the breakfast I cooked?" demanded Mack.

"Those flap-jacks you turned out this morning," continued Aiken breezily, as he kicked some sticks together to start the fire, "had uses of their own, I've no doubt. For instance, I suppose that as harness leather they'd compete with anything that a hungry coyote ever gnawed in the middle of winter; but as food they weren't even a good excuse for chewing gum. There's a lump in my stomach where they've gathered."

"My frien'," grunted Red Mack, and he waved to Aiken in formal courtesy, though his jaw set in a hard line, "you can go the limit. I resign."

"Thanks," chuckled Jerry.

He rolled and twisted up a piece of paper so that it would burn more slowly, lighted it, and placed it on the ground. Over it he laid some of the small, dry twigs.

He continued: "As a cook, Red, you've good intentions, but that's about all. That coffee this morning was the nearest thing to lye I've ever drunk."

Here the Runt, in some alarm, caught the arm of Red Mack. His grip was iron.

"Don't do nothing rash, Red," he said anxiously. "You're keepin' hold on yourself, ain't you?"

"I'm tryin'," grunted Red.

"Words ain't bullets," persisted the Runt persuasively. "Let 'em go. This feller is jest a talkin' fool. Which you can get hanged for killin' even fools."

"Look at him now," groaned Red. "He's grinnin' to himself. If I could jest once take him by the neck and—"

"Hang onto yourself, Mack. Think of the easy money we get on this job."

"Is it worth it?"

"It sure is. Besides, don't forget that our time is comin' later on, Red."

Red sighed profoundly. "It ain't what he says," he observed sadly to the Runt, "but it's the way he says it that makes me want to wring his neck."

Yet, however wordy he might have been, Jerry Aiken set about his work as if he were a past master of camp-cooking. In a moment a pyramid of jumping yellow flame rose crackling above the dry brushwood which Nancy brought for the fire, and then he began the real business of cooking.

John Scovil helped him, but his duties were limited to the opening of cans and such servile work; the real effort remained solely in the hands of Aiken. He worked rapidly, as if he were perfectly at home in such duties.

A collapsible oven appeared and was set up over the first fire, and while it heated Scovil built a second blaze, Aiken being occupied in mixing with canned milk two tin pans filled shallowly with dough, and these were baking in the hot oven within five minutes from the beginning of the operations.

The sweet, pungent odor brought Nancy Scovil close. Next, with the remnants of the batter, mixed thin with water, he compounded corn fritters and set these sizzling over the second fire. Bacon, too, began to fry, and, like a trumpet sounding reveille, the sharp perfume touched the nostrils of the rest.

Nancy lounged nearer and nearer to the scene of cookery with something akin to interest flickering in her eyes while Jerry placed a coffee-pot over the fire. Corn fritters, hot bread, coffee, bacon! And that was not all. The nimble fingers of Jerry, dexterous as when they flew among the cards, seized from the hands of the admiring Scovil two tins of red salmon. To be heated by frying? Or by boiling? No, no! Aiken lifted his hands in horror at

the suggestion of Scovil, and the next instant he was swiftly grating cheese. With this he compounded the salmon and added seasoning before the salmon joined the baking bread in the oven. A feast!

Red Mack and the Runt held thoughtful communion in the background.

"Seems to me, Red," observed Pete, "that we kind of got our wires crossed about this Aiken gent. He don't handle them two fires like no tenderfoot. Why, I figure old Shorty, that was cook so long for the Circle Bar L, could of took lessons maybe from this Aiken. Smell that bread bakin' when he opened the oven door?"

"I did," nodded Red, "but I ain't makin' no remarks till I taste the food. Lots of hosses looks good, but they turn out high-headed fools when it comes to runnin' cattle, Runt."

Runt nodded at this profound truth.

"Like that pinto of mine," he suggested. "But they's something about this Aiken gent. You notice he don't wear no gun."

"Ain't that a sure sign of a tenderfoot?"

"I dunno, I dunno," said Pete hastily. "We got time to find out what he's like, ain't we? But don't go stackin' your coin on him bein' a fool till you see the way the cards are runnin'. Mack, look at that bread! Kind of crust ma used to have on hers!"

One by one the dishes were brought forth. And all together. By some sort of uncanny instinct Jerry had so managed that within the same moment the coffee steamed and lifted the lid of the pot, and when it was removed from the fire the opened oven revealed the pans of bread browned to an even tone that might have delighted the heart of the best chef in Paris. There was the fish and grated cheese crisped perfectly, over which the cook now scattered a final coating of the newly grated cheese and another dash of seasoning. Moreover, the bacon lay in its tin in lean, symmetrical strips, wavering up and down to indicate that it was crisped to perfection.

They gathered. If a morning's riding had put an edge on their appetites, the sight of the viands increased those appetites to a razor keenness. And even Nancy Scovil uttered a deep sigh as she took her place at the tarpaulin which served as the table. Jerry Aiken, the last to sit down, cast about him a final glance like a general about to charge into battle in the crisis, and he smiled with content as he surveyed the expectant faces.

Then he took his place, and he himself served them with the address and the same speed which had marked his cookery. Not only were the portions generous, but they were so arranged that the tin plates did not seem in the least crowded.

Huge slices of the "pone" neighbored heaping piles of the fish and cheese, and orderly pieces of bacon trimmed the side of the plate; while all were grouped around the corn fritter in the center.

And such corn fritters! From a deep brown at the crisp, thin edges, they swelled toward the center a delicious yellow. But chief of all, each plate was flanked by a steaming cup of coffee.

You may take whisky and even tobacco from the man of the mountain desert, and he will endure and perhaps not complain overmuch, for he is accustomed to hardships; but take away his coffee, and no money can purchase his services, no force can divert the heavy hand of his wrath. They are forced to drink whatever brand of the drink is set before them, but each, in his heart of hearts, carries the thought of one perfect brand of coffee which he has drunk many and many a day ago—one and one only.

Yet it was not strange that when the Runt and Red Mack looked into the cups which Jerry Aiken had made for them, each thought his old dream was come true again. For the coffee was a dark brown, but so transparently clear, so free from any suspended particles of the ground beans, that they could see the bottom of their tin cup with the golden sunshine glinting on them; and from the cup arose a delicate and yet shrewd aroma that opened the heart.

Red Mack silently, with a trembling hand, poured a careful amount of canned milk into his portion. Pete the Runt cast a glance of utter scorn at his old comrade and raised his own portion undiluted with a baser liquid.

"Partner," he said in a deeply moved

voice to Jerry Aiken, "they is coffee and coffee!"

Jerry Aiken nodded and prepared himself for the compliment with the usual foolish smile of the flattered.

"And from the smell of this, and the looks of this," went on Pete the Runt in his rather formal oration, "I'd say that—"

The voice of Nancy Scovil broke in, unhurried, soft: "This is about the worst coffee I've ever drunk."

They looked at her in amazement, and the Runt lowered his cup.

"You haven't even tasted it," said Jerry Aiken coldly.

"I don't have to," went on the purring voice of Nancy, and her filmed glance rested without either contempt or malice upon Jerry. "Like Mr. Peter, I can tell what it is by the looks." She raised the tin cup and tasted the drink. "But the taste is worse than the look. However, I suppose you're used to the vile stuff."

Jerry Aiken could not speak; the others hastily, covertly, raised their cups and drank, and then turned their eyes in a mute chorus one upon the other. Not one of them could find anything wrong with it; to the Runt, indeed, it was delicious beyond words, but it requires a dauntless spirit to praise where others have criticised. It seems to reflect an uneducated, provincial mind.

So the Runt muttered: "Seems to me you're right. I dunno what it is. They's something wrong with it."

"The worst coffee," said John Scovil, with heavy conviction, "that I've ever drunk."

Under these three blows, one after the other, Jerry Aiken sat stunned. He looked about him helplessly, but the eyes of all were lowered toward their plates. And, perhaps to prove that to him, at least, the coffee was perfect, Aiken drank a huge swallow of it and burned his throat.

He was still spluttering and choking when he saw the face of Red Mack as a generous chunk of bread disappeared into his mouth. The eyes of Mack glistened. He ate hurriedly and swallowed in haste, his eyes already speaking while his mouth was still too fully occupied to permit speech. Nancy Scovil, too, was nibbling a corner from her piece of bread.

"That *is* bread!" burst out Red Mack, his voice going out like an indrawn sigh. "Man, man, that *is* bread!"

"Solid, isn't it?" nodded Nancy Scovil calmly. "Good, durable bread. Just the thing for camping trips. But I don't understand, Mr. Aiken, why you didn't do your baking before you started. Your bread would be just as good after a month on the road as it is now."

"Why do you eat it, then?" snapped Jerry Aiken.

"For exercise," answered the unhurried voice. "It may give me an appetite for the rest of the things you've—cooked."

And she instantly disposed of another large morsel of the pone.

"But—it looks all right, don't it?" muttered Red Mack.

"Doesn't it!" agreed the girl. "It has that advantage over the coffee."

"It's the last time," said Jerry Aiken hotly, "that I'll ever touch a frying-pan while we're on the trip."

"It usually *is* better to stick to things we know how to do, isn't it?" suggested the girl, and something like a smile, ever so faint a hint of light, appeared, twinkled, and went out deep in the black shadow of her eyes. "Like cards," she added.

Jerry Aiken, anxious and perturbed, hurriedly broke off a bit of bread and ate it, his eyes going thoughtfully up like a musical connoisseur listening to his favorite symphony.

"If this bread is bad," he began hotly, as soon as he had finished, "I'll—"

"It isn't bad at all," said the girl reassuringly. "Not bad at all, after you've tasted the fish. It looks like salmon; it has the same smell; but it's as dry as woodchips. You have a talent for spoiling things, Mr. Aiken."

Jerry Aiken breathed once, twice, and again before he trusted himself to speech.

"Appreciation in women," he observed, "is like gratitude in mules—it isn't there."

Red Mack recalled some of the disparaging remarks which Jerry Aiken had made concerning his own culinary efforts of that morning; he now brightened visibly.

"It ain't talk," he remarked, "that makes a cook, and words don't take the place of salt and pepper. Anyway, Aiken, you *meant* well by us. They ain't no reasonable doubt of that."

Jerry Aiken glowered in silence, bolted the food which remained on his plate, and retired to a distance beyond ear-shot. There they saw his lips moving while he walked to and fro puffing on his cigarette, but no sound blew over to them.

CHAPTER XIV.

POKER.

FROM this distance, under the impression that he was strolling back and forth with the manner of one wholly detached and oblivious to his surroundings, Jerry Aiken now and again turned an angrily watchful eye upon the others, who still sat about the tarpaulin eating at their own lolling ease. Red Mack finished first, and Scovil second, with Pete the Runt considerably in the rear of these; but still Nancy Scovil ate on, unhurried, leisurely. There remained at last some of the salmon and cheese which she had stigmatized as "wooden chips," and even this she scooped onto her plate and finished it with the last crumbs of the bread.

Jerry Aiken, fascinated, watched her polish off the remnants. He drew nearer, like a bird caught by the eye of the snake. What was there about her? Was all this languor a sham? Was there, under the surface, a mind as keen as the tongue whose satire had transpierced him just the moment before? No; she seemed quite unaware that she had routed him and driven him to a distance. In his judgment, she had not opened her lips since he left them.

The last of the food was gone. It was not gluttony. No, there was nothing puffy or fat or flabby or weak about her. He remembered with what ease she had swung the heavy hatchet in her single hand, and the lithe grace with which her body gave to the motion of the horse all morning, and the speed and tirelessness with which she had run after them as they left the first camp.

Her eating reminded him of the eating of some beast of prey—some beautiful and dangerous panther which feeds heavily and then has a great reserve of energy which will sustain it through a long period of fast and effort. Or was she not more like some hibernating animal whose nourishment in the autumn must carry it through the lean, cold fast of the long winter? Winter, unquestionably, reigned in the soul and body of Nancy Scovil. She slept a long sleep. But what if she awakened?

That was the point! In the mean time she had baffled and scoffed at him; he quivered at the thought of it. He felt a touch of anger such as none but a man had ever called forth in him before.

Her dinner finished, she raised her head and sent the first intelligent glance about her, not as one having enough, but rather because there was no more in sight which she could consume. Then she leaned back, straightened her legs, and stretched out her arms. Her head canted back and then a little to one side, and one by one Jerry Aiken watched the lithe muscles of her body curve out against her clothes. Presently a new inspiration came to Jerry Aiken. Neither verbal abuse nor physical labor seemed to stir in her the faintest flicker of revolt or supply the least incentive to action; but he remembered hearing that no woman can lose money and retain her equanimity.

"Shove the dishes off the tarp, boys," he said, sitting down at his former place. "You have some cards, haven't you, Red What about a little hand of poker? A five-handed game."

"You mean the lady to play?" queried the Runt.

"Why not?"

"I'd like to," murmured Nancy, "if I can keep awake."

And she covered a long, leisurely yawn. One of Nancy's yawns, indeed, was a marvelous thing to watch, for every inch of her body seemed to tingle with the pleasure of the stretching. It was like seeing a panther awakening from a long winter-sleep, except that in the case of Nan Scovil the awakening was never quite completed.

So they knocked the dishes away, drew

the tarpaulin taut, and Red Mack produced a pack of greasy, thick-edged cards. It was singular to watch the change of expressions on the faces of the men, for friendship ceases and Auld Lang Syne is not when poker is the order of the day in the mountain desert.

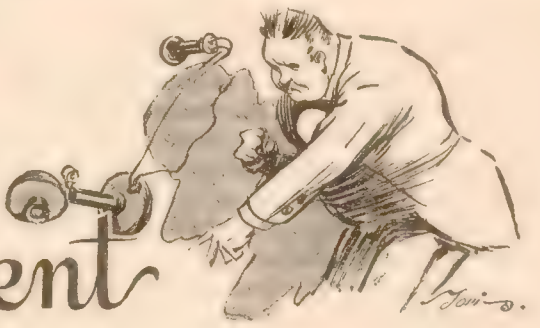
They sized each other up cautiously, silently. The stolid face of the Runt grew yet more masklike; the small, shrewd eyes of Red Mack glittered with strange intentness; the confident smile of John Scovil seemed ominous; and then there were the nervous, swift fingers of Jerry Aiken as he shuffled the cards, for by the cut the first deal had fallen to him.

"Now's where we knife the tenderfoot," muttered Red Mack to the Runt. "Here's where we sink a prong into that wad Aiken carries. When it comes to my deal, Runt—"

He broke off the muttered communication by saying aloud: "This ain't half bad." He completed his survey of the circle, ending it with a needle-pointed scrutiny of Jerry Aiken.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Absent Treatment



by *Garret Smith*

"HELLO! Hello!! Hello!!!"

Alexander K. Desmond, president of half a dozen important companies and member of so many more boards of directors that he had lost count of them, ended his crescendo roar into the inert receiver by smashing it down on the hook and pacing jerkily from end to end of his big overfurnished library.

"Infernal danged thing!" he barked. "Pesters the life out of me when I want to rest and goes dead when I want to use it."

The maligned instrument broke in again with a jeering jangle, the man at the other end having evidently induced Central to restore the broken connection. Desmond's thin lips tightened and curled into a snarl of unreasoning fury. He menaced the clanging metal demon with a big bony fist.

"Some one of those doddering idiots trying to pester me with fool questions! Knowles, probably, wanting advice about that B. and A. bond issue. Or maybe Caldwell with another suggestion on the Chesapeake matter. Might be Bidding trying again to get me to corner Mid Western. Some fool with fool talk! Hang the whole crew! Can't they get it through their fool heads that I have my plans all set and all they've got to do is take orders?

"I won't answer it. Why the devil did I let Morrison off over Sunday anyhow? Makes me a confounded telephone-boy. Nobody but me has any sense of responsibility. My secretary can take a week-end off and forget everything but that fool girl he's courting. If I go off the job fifteen minutes everything goes wrong. Good Lord, how I am hampered!"

The phone kept up its metallic petition. Desmond stopped and stared at it a little relentingly.

"Might be something important," he grumbled. "Better not take a chance."

He strode over to his desk and snatched up the receiver.

"Hello! Hello!! Hello!!!" he shouted.

"Oh, that you, Caldwell?"

He listened a moment to the other man.

"Don't worry about that," he interrupted impatiently. "Look here, let me tell you what I have in mind. You fellows are pestering the life out of me when you ought to know by this time that I go ahead and do things without taking every Tom, Dick, and Harry into my confidence till I'm through. There's too much chance for a leak that will spoil things. We won't go ahead with any reorganization of Chesapeake now for the simple reason that when we do reorganize it we are going to include with it the properties of the B. and A. and the Mid Western and have a transcontinental line which is the only hope of salvation for all three roads.

"What? That's what I said. Of course, combine the three roads. Never thought it could be done? Well, I'm the boy who can do it, and probably the only one, so just keep out of my way, and follow orders. Knowles thinks I'm crazy to put out that B. and A. bond issue in a form he says the public won't touch. I don't want the public to touch it. I'm getting control of the Mid Western without Bidding knowing it, and when I get it the Mid Western board will take over the B. and A. bonds in a block and the road along with it. Then I'll be ready to reorganize the Chesapeake and combine with the other two. See? Well, keep it under your hat. If any of those three crowds got wise they'd block the game, for there's only one thing they hate worse than each other, and that's me, and yet I'm the only one who can save their financial skins.

"What's that you say?

"Good Lord! Why didn't you say so before? Good-by. Just thought of something. Must call Knowles."

He called Knowles and told him he had decided it was best to push the bond issue through a week earlier than he had planned. His talk with Caldwell had convinced him that his lieutenants were getting uneasy almost to the breaking point. If one of them should kick over the traces and refuse to take orders in the dark the whole plan would break down. He had taken Caldwell partly into his confidence just now in the hope of keeping him lined up a little longer.

Caldwell had learned that an opposition crowd headed by old man Holsworthy had set out to get control of the three roads Desmond was trying to consolidate. It was a powerful combination, and one that even the indomitable Desmond would find it hard to beat. If they succeeded it would mean simply a looting process. The Holsworthy crowd would jocky the securities of the unlucky roads until they had made all they could out of them and then unload, leaving the properties to fall to pieces.

The perfecting of a trans-continental railroad system had been a dream of Desmond's for fifteen years. With that end in view he had smashed his way from one brilliant coup to another. Now, at fifty, when he saw his dream about to be realized, it looked as though he might be frustrated at the last moment.

It was now well into Saturday afternoon. The insurgent crowd would be on the job every moment until Monday morning when the struggle for control would culminate in a big open fight. Desmond must do between now and then all that he planned to do in the next week and much more. He cursed himself again for letting his secretary off for the week-end. Then he listed on a piece of paper the men he must get in touch with at once.

But an hour of effort on the telephone left him in frantic despair. Every man he had counted on for assistance was away somewhere for Saturday and Sunday. Some were out of reach entirely. Some he tried to get on long-distance telephone with no success. To others he sent futile wires. But it was hopeless to get enough of them together to do anything effective.

Desmond, the self-sufficient, realized for once how much after all he depended on the cooperation of other people. He had the plans. He could get others to do his bidding blindly, but when the others could not be reached he was helpless. And he

had boasted more than once that he played a lone hand and took no one into his confidence.

Incidentally he learned that the opposition crowd had made much greater progress in their plans than his informant had supposed. He was beaten unless he could think up an entirely new campaign before Monday, and until that fateful day, when his own cohorts would be once more within reach, he could do absolutely nothing but plan.

He paced the floor and tried to think. But the harder he applied himself the more inert became his brain. He was all alone in the house excepting for the staff of unobtrusive servants. It was early summer, and his family was at the shore. Nevertheless the very quiet of the house preyed on his nerves until he had an hysterical desire to shriek. Desmond, did he but know it, was on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"Can't do a thing till Monday!" he groaned over and over again. "Then it 'll be too late. Everybody away. No sense of responsibility. Can't even think here. This house is like a tomb, crushing the life out of me."

Seizing his hat he dashed out for a walk in the park. But even the open spaces were oppressive. The high buildings along its margin seemed about to close together and overwhelm him. To his nostrils came the suffocating smell of hot asphalt. The distant hum of traffic shook his brain. His head was aching acutely.

He hurried back to the house and up to his library again. The telephone was clanging once more. He picked up the receiver.

"Hello! Hello!! Hello!!!"

"Number please," dulcetly remarked Central after a moment.

"You rang here!"

"Excuse it please!"

Then Desmond went berserk. With a spasmodic wrench he tore the telephone instrument from its connections and hurled it across the room where it crashed through a valuable Meissonier he had purchased the year before.

The frantic man did not delay to estimate damages. He ran up to his own suite, seized a bag that he always kept ready for traveling, rang for his car, and five minutes later was on the way to the Grand Central station.

"Tell my secretary when he comes in tomorrow evening that I've been called out of town, no matter where. I'll get in touch with my office by phone Monday," he directed the chauffeur as he alighted at the station.

He just made the Mountain Express by the last platform as it was pulling out.

"Now maybe I can think up in the woods," he grunted as he sank into his seat. "At least I'll be able to breathe and I'll be out of reach of that infernal telephone. If I've got to fail there'll be as good a place to take the blow as anywhere."

It was five o'clock the next morning when Desmond, in sport suit with knickerbockers he had taken from his bag, stepped off the train at a little flag station in the heart of the Adirondack forest. He stood on the deserted rough board platform and looked around for the man with the buckboard wagon he had wired to meet him and take him across to his lodge ten miles from the railroad over a rough mountain trail.

Desmond had purchased this lodge several years before with the intention of using it as a retreat when he needed a rest. But whatever the need may have been since he had never taken enough time off to make a visit there seem worth while. He had left the lodge with a caretaker, and had not seen it since he bought it.

The man with the buck-board had not yet arrived. He probably would be along any moment. Desmond had passed a sleepless night. His nerves were more frayed than ever. His head still ached. His whole body was twitching. Inaction was impossible. He decided to walk up the trail and meet the wagon.

So picking up his light bag he started into the forest at a quick, nervous pace. The trail was merely a narrow, deep-rutted wagon road, winding about the bases of the steeper mountains, rising over the gentler slopes, crossing the boggy flats between on bumpy corduroy bedding from which the gravel top-dressing had long since been washed away by the spring torrents. It

was a forest aisle between almost solid walls of great tree-trunks and undergrowth.

Desmond, city born and bred, was almost a stranger in the woods. In his ordinary moods he had no very friendly feeling toward the solitary places. The few vacations of his busy life had been taken at fashionable resorts where he could be with his family and keep within easy touch of town.

But just now the city and all its works filled him with a nausea almost physical. Above the roar of the train that had hammered at his shrieking nerves through the night, he had heard, or seemed to hear, continuously the clang of telephones, the insistent clicking of stock tickers, raucous conversations in many keys, the staccato tumult of the streets piercing the monotonous undertone of general traffic.

Now he was fleeing from it all into the luring silence of the wooded mountains ahead. He must find that soothing stillness beyond before his tortured brain burst. In frenzied haste he plunged forward toward the elusive thing he sought.

Down a long, easy slope ran the trail, about the base of a mountain, across a swale where he repeatedly stumbled on the rough logs of the corduroy road-bed and then up a steep ascent, the ground gouged and gullied by the freshets, upturned cobbles rolling beneath his tender feet and frequently sending him sprawling full length on the path.

Presently his body that had been full of the twinges of nervous exhaustion felt the healthy ache of physical weariness. His head stopped paining him as his unwonted exercise drew the blood away from his overwrought brain. He suddenly realized that in concentrating on the difficult process of keeping his footing, he had ceased to think of the nagging financial problem that had obsessed him. He was simply excruciatingly tired, and wanted above all things to lie down by the pathway and sleep.

A little farther on he struggled until the trail crested the ridge where the forest thinned to scrub pines, leaving unscreened miles of rolling forest scenery.

On a fallen log by the roadside he sat down and let his eye range over the tree-tops from one low peak to another until they faded in blue distance and blended with the cloud-banks. Beyond the most distant ridge the sun was bursting through a bed of chromatic splendor. The birds were just concluding their matins. The crisp breath of the dying night breeze cooled his heated body and tingled to the depths of his lungs with each panting breath. At last he began to feel a foretaste of peace.

For a moment the problem he had come to the woods to solve returned to his mind, and once more he groped about for solution. But somehow in the calm hush of the mountain morning it no longer seemed so important. His mind suffered a pleasant numbness and refused to react to his will. Nor did he struggle greatly with its inaction.

Presently he slipped down to a carpet of moss in search of an easier position and pillowed his head against the tree trunk. The wooded horizon wavered a little and grew indistinct to his vision, then faded out.

Alexander K. Desmond, facing on the morrow a struggle that would crown his career with spectacular success or end in irretrievable failure, slept the sleep of a tired baby.

He awoke finally in the midst of a dream of taking a shower bath in a dress suit in the presence of a board of directors who were greeting his performance with roars of Homeric laughter. He stood for a full minute foolishly rubbing his eyes before he realized where he was. The sky was overcast with thunder clouds and he was drenched by a heavy downpour that was still at its height. He scurried under the shelter of a pine until the shower was over. Then he set out on his journey again.

But as he started it occurred to him for the first time to wonder how long he had slept. He had forgotten to wind his watch the night before. The sky was still overcast, so there was no clue to be had from the position of the sun. He could only guess by the ravenous condition of his appetite that he had lost several hours.

Then another problem beset him. He was hopelessly turned around. Try as he might he could not determine in which di-

rection lay his destination. He was too poor an observer of things in the open to remember any marks along the way he had come. The vista on either hand seemed about the same.

When he finally did start out again, led by a blind instinct, he went in the direction opposite to what he intended, and, of course, was headed toward the station again. A little way along he came to a fork in the road. This puzzled him as he had been told that it was a single road all the way to his lodge. He believed he must be headed right as he had not seen this fork that morning. As a matter of fact he had not noticed it, because in going the other way it had come in behind him and he was on the main road.

Now, after some debate, he followed again his blind instinct and again he was wrong. Had he turned to the right he would have wound up back at the station in a little time and this tale would have had a different ending. But he turned perversely to the left and soon was putting both the station and the lodge he sought farther behind him at every step.

It soon became evident, too, that it was growing darker. He was aghast at being forced to the conclusion that he had slept all day. The time he had counted on for quiet, fruitful thought over his problem had been wasted. At that the weight of his problem again fell upon him. He must get to a telephone without delay. There was one at his lodge and he could reach some one of his associates in New York by this time certainly.

But a little farther along the darkening trail he came to an obstruction. A huge tree recently uprooted by the wind lay across the path. He made several attempts to break through, but the interwoven branches proved too thick a barrier. At length he gave it up and turned out to go around it. Then he found that the top of the tree lay in a section of swamp and he had to make a wide detour. In doing so he lost sight of the fallen tree and the trail in the dusk and heavy underbrush. A moment later he realized that he had lost his sense of direction again. He turned back toward the trail as he thought, but after a few minutes of beating through the bushes no trail appeared. He tried the opposite direction with the same result.

He was lost.

To make a short story of one of the longest nights Alexander K. Desmond ever spent, he did what many another unfortunate city man has done. He thrashed around in panic-driven circles, getting farther and farther away from the trail all the time, stopping at intervals to shout futilely, dropping exhausted now and then and several times dozing for a while against a tree trunk.

Just at dawn on the Monday when his fortune and his future depended on his being in touch with New York City at least by telephone, Desmond, completely exhausted from his exertions and lack of food, stumbled into a little clearing many miles away from the nearest of those instruments he had so often fervently cursed.

In the center of the clearing stood a one-room log cabin. Desmond staggered over to it and knocked. There was no answer. He peered in the one window and what he saw made him desperate. The door of the cabin was fastened with a padlock, but he smashed in the window, and though the little aperture was a tight squeeze and made Desmond think of the Biblical rich man and the needle's eye, he worked his way through. The next moment he was prying off the lid of a can of salmon. He devoured the entire contents of the can almost without chewing it and felt a little better. Then without stopping to take further stock of his surroundings he threw himself into a rude bunk that was built against the wall and instantly fell asleep from complete exhaustion.

When he awoke it was late afternoon again. He leaped to his feet to find himself fearfully lame and sore from his experience and once more decidedly hungry. But his head was clear at last.

As he realized that fact he suddenly awoke to his position. His fateful Monday had passed. By now he was virtually a pauper, for not only had he let his big project go by default, but he had tied up his whole fortune in manipulations aimed at controlling the three railroad properties.

By now the raid of the Holsworthy wreckers had come and gone and his margins had long ago been wiped out.

For a long time he sat with his head in his hands trying to reconcile himself to this thought. There was a chance that the plans of the opposition had miscarried or been delayed. There might yet be a chance of his doing something about it if he could get to the telephone. His brain was working clearly now. He thought of a dozen different methods of campaign in as many minutes. Why hadn't they occurred to him before he left town so madly Saturday afternoon? The helpless state of mind he was in then seemed inconceivable to him now.

If he could only get at a telephone! He looked about the little cabin as though he expected to find one concealed somewhere. It was evidently a hunter's lodge. It was well stocked with canned food, and there was evidence that the owner had left it recently. He might be back at dark.

But where was he anyhow? There might be other cabins near.

Desmond went out and circled the clearing. There was not even a path leading away from the cabin, excepting one that went down to a little land-locked lake, on the shore of which was a mark where a canoe had been recently shoved off. Evidently the resident of the cabin came and went by water. But there was no other craft in sight.

Desmond stood on the shore and hallooed until he was hoarse, but with no result. He gave it up finally and returned to the cabin where he consumed more of his unconscious host's provisions. Then he sat down and waited for that mysterious person's return.

But night fell and still there was no sign of human life. At last Desmond grew sleepy and rolled into the bunk again and slept until broad daylight. Still no proprietor appeared.

That day the lost man circled the lake, keeping in sight of the shore, but he found no trail leading away from it or any sign of any other habitation. The outlet of the little lake was a shallow stream that he waded across easily. He tried following this stream down a way, but it led to no trail, and ended about three miles down in a larger lake around which, as far as he could see, there was no indication of life.

So he returned to the cabin in the evening to find it still empty. And he was too tired to do anything but eat a hasty supper and roll into the bunk for a dreamless sleep.

Desmond awoke the next morning to realize to his surprise that he was feeling pretty fit again. He had made it a business asset to keep himself in good condition by brief daily work with a physical culture expert. His near breakdown had been the result of several weeks of overstrain. But he still had great recuperative powers. His three days of open air exercise had driven the roar of the city from his brain.

After breakfast he sat down and thought things out again. There could be no doubt now that the fight in town was over and that he had lost. He was broke or pretty close to it. True, he had been broke twice before in his career, but on those other occasions he had gone down in the arena fighting every inch of the way, and he had continued right on fighting after he was down until presently he had found himself on his feet again.

But now he had simply run away from the fight. And he was not on the scene to take up the battle again. He was an older man now, too. And there was something desperately final about this last defeat. It wasn't merely losing his great fortune. It was losing the cherished ambition that was to be the climax of his career.

But how peaceful it was up here! What a luxury to sit still with nothing to fight over! No day of strain ahead to be followed by others time without end until he got again so he couldn't think. His hatred for the telephone and all the artificial life it represented returned in full force.

Why should he return to it, a broken failure at fifty, when he might have endless days of this peace? He could still save his mountain lodge out of the wreckage and enough to keep him, and give him a little trip each winter. His wife had an independent fortune, so she was provided for. By Jove, he wouldn't go back.

From that moment Desmond settled

down to enjoy himself as he never had before in his life. As his host persistently stayed away he began to wish that his sojourn would be prolonged. He made no further attempts to find a trail away from the cabin. The weather continued cool, clear, and bracing. Desmond felt himself growing healthier every day. Physical exertion was becoming a delight.

At first he led a life of purely lazy savagery, sleeping endless hours, eating enormously of the liberal and palatable provisions the cabin afforded, taking long tramps and going in swimming two or three times a day.

But presently his rested and active mind began asserting itself.

"By Jove," he muttered one day, for he was getting into the solitary man's habit of talking to himself. "I boasted for years that I played a lone hand, that I depended on no one. I was kidding myself. I couldn't do a thing without the cooperation of other people, as I found out the other afternoon when I couldn't get my gang together in time to whip the Holsworthy crowd. Why, as a matter of fact, this is the first time I ever really played a lone hand in my life. Let's see what I can make of it."

He began by taking some fishing tackle he found in the cabin and, recalling the little of that lore he had learned as a boy, he began fishing for his meals, and after a little experimenting had fair success. His attempts at cooking his booty were lamentable at first, but he finally acclaimed the combination and thereafter gorged himself on fish until he craved other fare. He then varied it by heating the different canned meats. At length he essayed pancakes according to directions he found on a package of self-rising flour.

But cooking and fishing soon became part of the day's work. Searching for novelty he decided one day he could improve the cabin greatly by building a wing to it. He studied the old structure, and then taking an ax, began felling trees and cutting them into logs of the right length. The building of the cabin occupied a week and filled the builder with more pride than any financial coup he had ever pulled off.

When that was done he decided on a front porch for the whole structure. That took three days. Then furniture for the new wing and the porch was the next step.

When carpentry palled he took up landscape gardening, and presently had the clearing laid out in paths lined with transplanted shrubbery, rustic arches, rockeries and other adornments.

At the end of his fourth week of solitary exile, just as he was beginning to think he might amuse himself part of each year by starting a little business as builder of suburban homes near some small city, he heard a hail from the lake and a stranger drove a canoe up on the beach.

The newcomer was a tall, robust young chap, evidently a city man who spent his summers in the woods.

"Well, who the deuce are you?" demanded the newcomer. "And what in time you been doing to the old shack?"

"Are you the owner?" Desmond asked non-committally.

"I was," the other laughed, "but somebody, presumably you, has made it grow past my recollection. What's the idea?"

"Nothing except that I got lost in the woods about a month ago and have been living off you ever since. I'll settle for the provisions I've eaten and agree to remove my improvements if you don't like them. May I ask who you are? My name's Desmond."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Desmond. You have quite a famous namesake in New York City. No relative, I suppose. My name's Porter. I'm supposed to be a T. B. victim, up here for my health, but I'm about cured. I went over to the next lodge ten miles from here to a house party a month ago and caught cold, so they kept me there till I got over it. I'm very glad to have entertained a combination of carpenter and landscape artist in the mean time.

"You must be ready to get back to your party, though, by now. I'll be glad to paddle you over to my friend's lodge in the morning. There is an automobile road in from there to the railroad."

"I'll go with you if they haven't a telephone," Desmond laughed. "I'm sick of the danged things."

"Must be in the telephone business when you're home," the young man suggested tentatively.

"Well, I've been a sort of head operator for a good many years, and I'm through," Desmond replied cryptically.

"Oh, they have a phone, but you don't need even to see it if you don't want to," said Porter.

Just before noon the next day Desmond arrived with Porter at a big log lodge hidden among the trees at the lower end of the lake Desmond had sighted his first day at the cabin. He was introduced to a lively party and soon was feeling very much at home. He had to take a little chaffing over the coincidence of his name with that of the big New York financier, but he did not enlighten them as to his actual identity with that person. He had suddenly become very shy about admitting that he was that colossal failure.

"By the way," said a newcomer who had just arrived in the motor from the railroad, "I brought a last evening's paper with me from New York that has some interesting stuff in it about your namesake."

He handed Desmond the sheet, and this is what the amazed failure read:

DESMOND SPRINGS BIGGEST COUP YET

Is Man Behind New Transcontinental Merger, It Is Learned To-Day

Worked the Absent Treatment on Them

Wall Street was amazed to learn late this afternoon that the man behind the new transcontinental line formed by the merging of the Chesapeake Coast Line, the Mid Western and the B. and A. was really Alexander K. Desmond. At the time of the raid on those roads by the Holsworthy crowd a month ago, Desmond's sudden and mysterious disappearance gave rise to the rumor that he had joined forces with Holsworthy. Apparently that was what the wily old fox intended them to think.

It is well known that the leading factions of the three roads who have long resisted amalgamation were bitter enemies of Desmond. When they suspected, however, that their enemy was back of the raid on their securities they saw that their only hope of safety lay in amalgamation. They secured enough proxies to form a pool and check the bear raid and form the groundwork of the union of the roads.

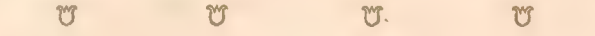
Not till the arrangement had gone too far to back out easily did they learn that the proxies that gave them control of the situation were all from stock secretly owned by Desmond, but nominally held by secret agents of the big financier. This interesting fact leaked out yesterday, and now it is said the old guard is busy trying to devise methods of shaking loose from Desmond before the old war horse decides to return from hiding and take personal charge of the fight.

Alexander K. Desmond sprang to his feet with a roar that amazed the company and led them to doubt the sanity of their strange guest. He had suddenly shaken off the philosophy of the simple life that had consoled him during his month of hermitage.

"May I use your phone?" he barked. "Just in time, by gad!"

A moment later they heard a bellow from the back room.

"Hello! Hello!! Hello!!! Long distance. Long distance, I said! Infernal danged thing! Pesters the life out of me when I want to rest and goes dead when I want to use it! Hello! Hello!! Hello!!! Good Lord, how I am hampered!"



This is the 138th Novel, Originally Printed Serially in this Magazine, to be Published in Book Form.

PAWNED

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

Author of "The Miracle Man," "From Now On," "The Sin That Was His," "The Beloved Traitor," etc.

(ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, February 5 to March 5, 1921)

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The Red Hibiscus

by *Herman Howard Matteson*

Author of "The Silent Partner," "Spell of the West Wind," "Daughters of the Sea," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A TEAPOT FULL OF PEARLS.

OLD DAN McGIFFERT'S imagination was as strong-winged as some far-flying bird. While his bent body hovered over the bench in the cubby-hole of an East Side shop where he did plumbing, steam-fitting, tea-kettle soldering, any sort of tinkering, his soul would be far a-field bent upon some high emprise.

Old Dan would build palaces in his fancy, level the forest stretches, lead wilful waters onto thirsty acres. Winged chariots Old Dan built, and utopian tall buildings, where every room of shop-girl or apprentice boy had a window looking out upon the sun, and a generous space of green grass whereon with impunity one might lie, and stare up at the infinite arch of blue sky that always made mundane troubles and problems appear less formidable.

Stuff of dreams. Of course, stuff of dreams. These things could never come to pass. But some of them would surely, for the sake of his daughter, Eenie, whom he loved. One could not always fail. Ah, no. The dreary tombstone row of his defeats lay now behind. Success was his, would be shortly, as soon as the thing was completed, sold. Then Eenie would have money. Old Dan McGiffert was an inventor.

A mysterious, low-arched door, leading into some hidden and unexpected apartment to the rear of the shop, opened and a girl thrust her head into view.

"Dinner, dad," she announced. "Dinner. Come on, Meenie."

For an instant the girl's gentle, thoughtful, brown eyes rested sadly upon the figure bent over the work-bench. Her father worked so hard, so very hard, yet seemed never able to distance the bills from landlord, grocer and butcher that hung about him like unfriendly curs at a pedler's heels.

"Dinner, dad," she repeated. "Come on, Meenie."

A thick-shouldered young fellow, freckled and florid of countenance, turned, grinned appreciation of the summons. Old Dan continued to gaze abstractedly at the bench littered with brass filings, bits of pipe, valve-packing, but turned at the third call, followed into the inner room.

The table, set for four places, was invitingly spick and clean. The fare, simple, was well cooked, tastily served.

The freckled young fellow scraped his chair up to the table.

"Where's old Snootey?" he demanded.

The girl didn't know. Old Snootey was getting rather irregular at meals of late.

"Are you going to take up Snootey's proposition, dad?" asked the girl, a trace of anxiety in her voice.

The girl and the plumber's apprentice exchanged glances.

Dan McGiffert sat playing with his knife and fork.

"Yes," he answered with sudden decision. "Yes. I'm going to take him up, give him a half interest. I know we can sell. That will furnish the funds for the—the expedition. Then we'll all be rich, fabulously rich. Think of it, Eenie, pearls, perfect, gorgeous, shimmering pearls, enough to fill your teapot there. One pearl is worth hundreds of dollars. A teapot full of pearls, Rich! We'll have millions."

Eenie, her back turned while she speared potatoes from a kettle, gave her head a doubtful toss. Meenie Martin, the apprentice, shifted his gaze from the old man's ardent countenance, fell to upon the food on his plate.

"You see," explained McGiffert, "there isn't a kind of recognized packing in existence that works in my valve. Meenie here knows that. The packings now in use swell too greatly under heat and steam, contract too greatly under cold. None of the known packings work. This fiber that the old sailor has brought works to perfection. I know now what that fiber is, where it came from. I could steal the idea, but it wouldn't be right. Besides, important as the secret of the fiber packing is, why it's nothing, simply nothing compared with the secret of the hoard of pearls. And I no longer doubt him.

"At first I did. But I've been to the library, and read. Now I believe him. That hideous, little, heathen stone god, no larger than Eenie's thumb, is the key that will unlock the treasure's hiding-place. Millions. I share and share alike with Thompson on my invention. I use to perfect it—the packing that he has brought, by accident, of course, but no matter. Perfect the invention with Thompson's fiber packing, give him half, sell the whole, with the proceeds outfit for the treasure hunt. Millions! Half of it mine, which means yours, Eenie, and you, too, Meenie."

The old inventor rested a benevolent glance upon his children. A tear showed upon the girl's cheek. Meenie, the apprentice, bent lower over his plate.

"It's all right, dad," said the girl bravely. "If you think it's all right—go ahead."

"Sure, go ahead," Martin agreed.

"It's sure a wild stunt, Eenie," confided Martin after the old man had returned to the workshop. "Wild is right. But his heart is set on it. Let him go to it."

A footstep sounded upon the shop floor. The little door opened, a man entered. None too sober, he sprawled himself at the table, sat staring foolishly at his plate.

The man's eyes were small, deep set, something the color of two boiled green peas. Between the boiled peas eyes descended a monstrous nose. This member, as if not already sufficiently conspicuous, was set off, as in parenthesis, by two deep wrinkles. The skin of the man's face, salt and wind-cured, was of the color and texture of a bacon-rind. The backs of the hairy hands, the portions of the wrists that showed below the cuffs of the gray flannel shirt were tattooed with figures of bleeding hearts, full-rigged ships, a voluptuous, none too extravagantly draped woman dancing in the center of a wreath.

The enormous nose fascinated, held the attention. The man's profile was not unlike that of a toucan. Eenie, watching him covertly as he hovered over his plate, almost expected the nose to open, take a peck at the food, and thus demonstrate that it was, after all, a beak, and not a nose.

The old inventor had followed the fellow into the living-room.

"I've decided to take you up, Thompson," said McGiffert.

Thompson looked up leeringly. "Al-ri," he said thickly. "We draw up papers, tie her up good and strong."

Anticipating a demand that had not, thus far, arisen, McGiffert, at the cost of great sacrifice, had had a company incorporated, and a thousand colorful certificates printed, shares in the McGiffert Steam Valve Company, Inc.

The consummation of the deal was simple. McGiffert turned over to Thompson five hundred of the thousand shares in the valve company. Thompson, on his part, made out a little chart, giving the sailing directions for reaching a certain island. Verbally, the partners agreed that as soon as McGiffert could find a purchaser, half of each partnership holding was to be pooled, sold for twenty thousand dollars, the money to be used in outfitting an expe-

dition to visit the island where the pearl treasure was secreted.

"Them pearls is there," insisted Thompson, "right there where I say, on that island. Sure the natives know about them pearls. Sure they do, and right where they're hid. Why don't them natives go dig 'em up, sell 'em! Say, you land folks don't know natives, leastwise not them kind of natives."

Thompson reached inside his flannel shirt, brought forth a tiny image carved from some sort of stone. The figure, no thicker through than the sailor's little finger, was an image of the body of a man clothed only in a loin cloth, but with the head of a mastiff dog.

"You don't know them kind of natives," repeated Thompson. "See this here little statoo? This here is a taboo. Sure them natives know where them pearls is hid. But without this taboo any party that's caught snoopin' after them pearls, why he'd better go feed hisself to the lions at the Bronx. It's the key to the place where the pearls is hid, this taboo is. And you can lay to that."

Fingering the tiny image, Mr. Thompson lopped across the table, expatiating at length how the fates had laid the course that had brought him to Dan McGiffert's tinkering shop.

"When I come warpin' into this identical shop," said Thompson, "Dan McGiffert there was plumb disgusted with life. He can't find no packing that 'll work in his valve. Fact. And there I stands, offering to sell a little pandang mat. I admit, I'm offering this mat so I can heave down in a grog bay, and enjoy a swaller. I admit it. Come to find out, dang if this pandang mat fiber hain't just what Dan McGiffert is looking for to pack his valve. I calls that work of fate. Sure. Dan to the end of his hawse, me all burnt out for a drink, I calls it fate."

Thompson poised the enormous nose, pecked it at McGiffert for emphasis. "Fate. Look what it's led to. Valve now perfect, thanks to the pandang mat. Sell for big money. Outfit, and away to the pearl island. We'll recover up them pearls, and then what money the patent fetched original, why, it won't look like no more than a plugged Trade's Settlement shilling."

Thompson focused the boiled peas eyes upon McGiffert.

"Fate! And a lot of luck, I'll swear. Say, McGiffert, you hain't got a dollar that's loose from its moorings? A dollar for kind of an advance like. Yeah, just a dollar. I won't be gone long. Dollar don't last long, you know."

Thompson arose from the table, thrust McGiffert's dollar, almost McGiffert's last, into his trouser pocket, folded the stock certificates, placed them in the inner pocket of his tarpaulin coat.

"Won't be gone long. Dollar don't last long, you know."

Eenie, her face flushing at her presumption, approached the table.

"Now that the deal is made, you have half of the stock, Mr. Thompson," said Eenie, "wouldn't it be as well to leave the little taboo image here? Wouldn't it be safer? You might loose it."

Dan McGiffert stood admiring his daughter's astuteness. It would be better, safer, to leave the taboo image in her keeping.

Thompson reached into his shirt, brought forth the image.

"Maybe better leave it here," he agreed. "But be dreadful careful of it. Key to them pearls, only key in the world. Won't be gone long. Dollar don't last long."

Thompson went rolling toward the door, turned, bobbed the big beak nose, closed the door after him.

But Dan McGiffert's silver dollar in some manner acquired a longevity that silver dollars rarely possess. The night passed, the following day, and still Mr. Thompson did not return. A week passed, a month, three months.

With fiber unraveled from the pandang mat, McGiffert completed ten of the steam valves. They were perfect. But expenses mounted, debts piled up. To relieve the pressure temporarily, McGiffert sold a few of his shares for a few dollars each.

Still no word of Sailor Thompson. Dan McGiffert, having still rosy dreams of realities to come, took to his bed, and died.

Meenie Martin, the street waif whom McGiffert had taken into his house and

shop as son and apprentice, declared that he would keep the little tinker place going. But the debts were many, the location becoming more and more impossible.

One morning a thin-visaged man whose countenance was as soulless as one of the brass castings upon which Meenie was at work, opened the shop door, walked in. The visitor said that he was an attorney, represented the multimillionaire estate of Cushman Caley, Sr. The Caley estate owned a majority interest in the McGiffert Steam Valve. Would Mr. Martin be good enough to turn over immediately all blueprints, records of patent rights, and all valves actually completed?

Meenie Martin glared truculently at the attorney.

"Let's see your papers," demanded Martin.

The attorney thumbed over a bundle of certificates which aggregated exactly fifty-two per cent of the issue of the McGiffert Steam Valve Company, Inc.

"All right," said Martin. "But you come around this afternoon. I'm busy. I hain't got the valves and so forth. Eenie McGiffert has got them."

Recalling the day when their sidewalk playmates had invested them with their abiding nicknames, "Eenie and Meenie," borrowed from the old counting out formula, "eenie, meenie, minie, mo," Martin entered the little living-room, gravely announced, "Eenie, we're it. He's come for the valves, papers, everything. I never did trust Snootey the way your dad did. That stone image, the pearls—piffle."

Martin clenched a large fist, examined it critically.

"I'm going to take the packing out of them valves. I'll give the valves to the lawyer. Some wise Ike will try regular packing in 'em, find out it's no go. Then they'll come and talk to us. Get the idea, Eenie? Sure, it's all right. Your dad give up half the stock, and what did he get—a stone image, and a map of a' island that's nowhere. We'll hold out the secret of the valve packing. Maybe it hain't legal, but it's fair."

A bit reluctantly, not at all sure that it was quite right and honest, Eenie agreed.

Martin, first gazing about the low-flung rooms that had been the only home he had ever known, sighed prodigiously.

"Might as well give up," he blurted out. "Can't make the shop pay. I can get my four dollars a day—we won't starve."

Eenie smiled wanly. No, they wouldn't starve. She should go to work also.

The girl brought forth the ten completed valves, and Martin proceeded to remove the pandang packing, roll the fiber in a bit of paper, which he laid away.

That afternoon the attorney returned, carried away the ten incomplete valves.

"He'll be back," said Martin, grinning shrewdly, "when he finds the valves are no good. Then we'll talk business, twenty-thousand-dollar business we'll talk."

But the attorney did not return. Reconsidering, hoping that he would return, offer twenty thousand dollars for the secret of the valve packing, Martin hung on, kept the shop running a little longer, a week longer, a month.

Still no word from the attorney for the multimillionaire Caley estate. Martin hunted up the office building where the lawyer had said his place of business was.

The attorney was too busy to see Martin. A second call, and the solicitor condescended to see Martin, but had little to say. His client, Cushman Caley, Jr., had, in the course of business, acquired control of the McGiffert valve. The attorney knew nothing of Mr. Caley's plans touching the valve. The attorney smiled patronizingly at Martin. Caley was worth fifteen million. In the affairs of Cushman Caley, Jr., the McGiffert valve was about as important as a single tack in the stair carpet of a forty-story building.

Then Meenie Martin went to sleuthing. He learned that Thompson, the sailor, had borrowed ten dollars from a collateral loan man, putting up the stock of the McGiffert valve as security. The deal had been consummated in an East Side saloon frequented by sea-faring folk.

The collateral loan man had nothing to say to Meenie Martin. The collateral loan man, had he so desired, could have thrown quite a bit of light upon the situation. He could have told how he had given a tip

to a certain acquaintance who, seeking Thompson in the groggery, had helped the latter spend his ten dollars, and had then aided in carrying Thompson to a sailing vessel berthed in the river, a vessel that weighed that night for South America.

So, unaware of these facts, and likewise unacquainted with the channels of brokerage through which flow to a common head stocks of every sort, Meenie Martin couldn't even guess that a shrewd manipulator had acquired control of the McGiffert valve, picking up some of the scattered stock that Old Dan had hypothecated, had sold the whole to the Caley estate.

These things Meenie Martin did not learn. He did learn enough, however, to send him back to the little plumbing shop in a thoroughly ugly mood.

"Eenie," he said, entering the living-room, and flinging his cap onto the table, "Eenie, this Cushman Caley that's got control of our patent hain't worth only fifteen million dollars. He can't spend a tenth of his income. Fact. It hain't fair. Look how your dad worked, Eenie, for years, years. It hain't fair. I'm going to camp on the trail of Cushman Caley. Somehow, I don't know how, but somehow I'm going to get action. Cushman Caley is going to pay us up in full. You watch."

Eenie sat with her hands folded in her lap.

"We can stick it out here another week or so, can't we, Eenie?"

She nodded her head, yes. Then she gathered her face in her hands and began to cry.

Martin took Eenie's little hand into his vast, freckled fist. "There, there, Eenie. It hain't so bad. Four dollars a day—I can get it easy. I'd soon have a raise. Any time—you know, Eenie—I been thinking—don't cry no more, Eenie."

CHAPTER II.

WHERE THE PANDANG GROWS.

CUSHMAN CALEY, Jr., aged twenty-eight, was finding life stale, flat and unprofitable. In the Caley stables were running horses that never ran; in the Caley kennels were Airedale bear dogs that had never seen a bear, nor so much as sniffed the splay footprints of one; in the offing rode at anchor a sea-going yacht that rarely went to sea. What was the use? Cushman Caley was training for life as Turkish wrestlers train for a match, by simply doing no training at all.

On this especial day Cushman Caley, Jr., had several grievous problems confronting him. The affair of the McGiffert valve was none of them, however. Caley was not only entirely unaware of the fact that he controlled the McGiffert patent, he didn't even know there was such a thing as a steam valve.

Young Caley's most immediate problem was to replace Henning. Henning had been Caley's valet, and Henning had up and left. Henning had been a helpful and handy soul. He could shave a man passingly well, and could concoct a good clam-chowder. Henning once had slapped a brakeman who had kicked Cushman Caley's bag as it lay upon the car-platform. It was going to be difficult to replace Henning.

Problem No. 2 was the growing, irksome demands made upon his time and patience by his fiancée, Lei Lancaster. Lei, who was worth a couple or three million herself, appeared to think that all a prospective husband was for was to retrieve things for her, run errands, pop up when called upon to dance, sing, swim, or otherwise perform. Cushman Caley began to have a vague suspicion that Lei was selfish.

The single acceptable diversion that Caley found at the fashionable up-coast summer resort was Mrs. "Klondyke" Williams. Mrs. Klondyke was as natural, unaffected and old-fashioned as a red geranium.

Mrs. Klondyke Williams was a widow. She was twenty-five years old. Mrs. Williams was moderately wealthy. She had an ambition, but it was an ambition neither for more wealth, nor a second husband.

In gallant comradeship, Caroline Williams had known a real man. Together, she and Charlie Williams had starved, frozen; together they had essayed all the perils of the Alaskan passes in winter. Together they had reared a little cabin, and

together they had panned a fortune from the golden sands of the Tanana.

Once, when the snows had lain deepest, and the frost had begun to split the rocks, Charlie Williams had gone forth to the rescue of a packer long overdue, and had never returned.

The outlook of Caroline Williams upon life was decidedly not that of the misanthrope. Grief rarely hardens the unselfish heart. Caroline remembered Charlie Williams, every day she thought of him, and her ambition was to raise a lot of money, build cabins all along Alaska's more perilous trails, keep them outfitted with fuel, grub, and blankets.

When first Caroline broached her philanthropic project to Cushman Caley he had smiled, referred her to his solicitor, who, he said, investigated all begging charities. Lei Lancaster hadn't even smiled. She had simply stared coldly, changed the subject.

During the weeks that followed, Caroline Williams got rather better acquainted with Caley, and with Lei Lancaster. Nothing daunted by a first refusal, Caroline cultivated Cushman Caley. Caley found Caroline diverting, restful, and began to seek her out. So did Lei Lancaster. Cushman Caley was finding the handsome young Alaskan widow altogether too attractive.

The steady, blue, discerning eyes of Caroline, or Klondyke as Caley most frequently called her, were beginning to discover the hidden pay-dirt in Caley's entity. 'Way down underneath, Caley was something of a man after all. Yes, he had the making of a man. It was going to be a downright crime for him to marry one as hopelessly selfish as Lei Lancaster.

Keeping her Alaska cabin project still in mind, Caroline found herself constantly meditating an aphorism that had been a favorite of her dead hero husband, "If you want to know what the heart of a man is, get him onto the trail when you're grub shy, and blanket shy."

If, not too literally, she could get "Cush" Caley and Lei Lancaster onto the trail—exactly what would Caroline Williams discover about Cushman Caley, what would Cushman Caley discover about Lei Lancaster?

Klondyke, walking the beach, rested her gaze upon the Giaour, Caley's fine seagoing yacht, that lay at anchor. After a thoughtful moment she walked on, mounted the broad veranda steps of the hotel, thrust her pretty, animated face in at the door.

Cushman Caley lay sprawled upon a rattan chaise longue, trying to read.

"Hey, Cush, come out of it," hailed Caroline. "You know what they do up Alaska way when they find a bear hibernating, and want some action? They pour coal-oil on his back, touch a match. Where's the coal-oil can?"

Caley grinned, arose from the chaise longue, followed Caroline out of the hotel, down the stretch of sandy beach. There Caley began to tell Klondyke his troubles. Henning had left. What was he going to do?

"For the love of Jerry's partner," exclaimed Caroline. "Henning left. You'll have to brush your own teeth. That 'll never do at all. Get another man. And say, Cush, get a *man*. That Henning was no more human than a breakfast mackerel. You just ought to have known Skamokawa George that packed for us one season up the Tanana. Indian, yes, he was part Indian, but a man. Get some one like Skamokawa George, if you can. Don't you know, Cush, everybody you have about you influences you to some degree. Get a man—if you can."

Down the beach a distance sauntered Lei Lancaster. Caroline didn't care about the intrusion of Lei Lancaster just at that moment, so she maneuvered Caley around back of some tumbled boulders.

"Cush," said Caroline earnestly when they had seated themselves, "did you ever figure that you could get some action, man-action, if you went on a good, long hunt somewhere? How'd you feel, Cush, how'd you act if you met up with a Kodiak bear that weighed a ton, whose pelt would carpet a floor twenty by twenty feet?

"You don't care anything about hunting, shooting?

"Did you ever think of going up the Amazon River, searching for new kinds of orchids? Or why don't you rig up a dredge, take your yacht, go to the Caribbean,

dredge for deep sea life—shells, sea-weeds—great game, that, Cush. No? Don't interest you."

Caroline Williams studied him a moment, returned to the attack.

"Then why don't you take that steam kiak of yours, outfit, go for a treasure hunt? Lots of ships lost.

"You don't need any more treasure. Sure not. But the action. Cush, to get some action. Man, man, action. Haven't you any imagination—deep sea galleons—pieces of eight—dead men's chests. Man, man!"

Cushman Caley began to look mildly interested. A treasure hunt mightn't be so bad. That is, it mightn't be so bad if a fellow only knew there was any. Who wanted to hunt treasure where it wasn't?"

Caley was gazing seaward.

"If I did go off on a fool stunt of some sort, would you go along, Klondyke?"

Caroline rested her blue eyes steadily upon Cushman Caley.

"I might, Cush," she answered guardedly, "that is, if Lei went along also. Of course, you'd expect to take Lei along."

None too enthusiastically, Caley nodded his head. That was to be expected—take Lei along.

But something began to dampen what small measure of interest he had had in a treasure hunt. Bunk! Where was any treasure the finding of which was even a hundred-to-one shot? Bunk!

Get 'em on the trail—grub shy—blanket shy.

A dozen fantastic schemes ran through her mind. Only in part did she hear, comprehend Caley's wail as he took up the matter of the difficulty of replacing the departed Mr. Henning.

"Dawson has visited every intelligence office in New York," said Caley. "We've run ads in all the New York papers. Men are scarce, the kind of a man I want. Dawson wired that he was bringing up two or three for me to look over."

Caley began to laugh. "Look them over, Klondyke, and see if you can spot a second Skamokawa George."

"I'll do it," answered Caroline promptly. "I'll do it."

Caley reached a hand to help her up.

"Dawson is due on the ten twenty," said Caley. "Come on."

Back to the hotel went Caley and Caroline. Seated upon the veranda they presently caught sight of Dawson debouching from the station. Immediately behind Dawson trailed two servile appearing persons, and a little in the rear a third, who seemed to be gazing about him with much interest and animation.

As Dawson mounted the steps, Caroline whispered to Caley that the two first applicants wouldn't do at all.

Caley shook his head at Dawson, and the latter at once put his hand into his pocket, paid the rejected men their fares back to New York.

Applicant No. 3 was staring up at the striking, somewhat bizarre architecture of the hotel. Dawson called to him to come on, but he took his own time about coming on. When, finally, he did reach the piazza, he grinned, stuck out a large, freckled hand for Cushman to shake.

Caley, apparently, didn't see the hand. But Caroline Williams did. She reached, shook the man's hand with a good, honest miner's grip.

At once, with his free hand, the fellow grabbed off his cap. Caroline appraised him swiftly. Thick of wrist, heavy of shoulder, the man's face was florid, freckled. His eyes were steady, unafraid.

"I, that is," began the applicant for the place of Henning a bit haltingly, "a friend seen your ad. 'Go take a fly at this bird,' she says to me. So I come. I—"

"Drive a car?" asked Caley.

"Sure. I've drove delivery-wagons."

"Repair?"

"Sure. Repair anything I can get a Stillson wrench onto, or a screw-driver into. Sure."

"Whip a brakeman?"

"Try, if he's in my class. Got any special shack in mind?"

Caroline Williams tugged at Caley's sleeve, whispered, "He's your man. Skamokawa's build to a tee. Take him."

"I'll give you the place," said Caley. "What's your name?"

"Martin—Meenie Martin, they call me.

You ever count out to see who was it when you was a kid? There I got my nick, Meenie. And I got a little pal called Eenie. Hain't that funny?"

Mr. Martin was staring out to sea.

"That your ya't?" pointing to the Giaour. "Some canal boat. I'd like to ride 'er down to Coney some Sunday. Any machinery aboard that needs fixing, I'm your jazbo. Steam-fitting, valve-grinding," —he turned to look hard at Cushman Caley —"valve-grinding, I'm there like a crate of ducks."

Caroline smiled her approval. The new man, prompt, helpful, was very like Skamokawa George.

There was no repairing to be done aboard the Giaour; the engineers attended to that feature. Caley pointed to the servant's annex, directed Martin to repair thither where quarters would be assigned to him, and whence he would be summoned when his master required him.

Klondyke Williams stood looking after the sturdy, retreating form of Meenie Martin.

"Cush," she said seriously, "I've just been thinking, a little, new twist to that treasure-hunting idea. Come on. Let's go where we can talk."

Again seated behind the screen of tumbled boulders, Caroline unfolded her plan. Cushman Caley scoffed, derided, pooh-hood, finally conceded that one might gain some action if the program were followed—agreed.

Together they hunted up Lei Lancaster.

"Lei," said Caroline authoritatively, "send to your bank and have them mail you a certified check for fifty thousand dollars."

Lei's voice was chilled. "What for?"

"Cush and I have just posted a bet of fifty thousand on which of us can first find a certain buried treasure. Kick in with your fifty, Lei, and we'll make it three-handed, winner takes all. If I should win—but you know my scheme for the Alaska cabins."

"Buried treasure," exclaimed Lei incredulously. "What treasure?"

"Isn't one hundred and fifty thousand dollars what you'd call treasure? I'd say a hundred and fifty thousand was quite some treasure. Of course it isn't hidden, not yet, it isn't. Cush's new man, this Martin he just engaged, will do the hiding. Oh, it will be a square game. He'll pick the hardest hiding-spot he can find, notify all three of us the general location of the treasure, then we'll go to it. He won't hide it here, but 'way off somewhere. Well, do you want in, Lei?"

Lei's cynical stare turned from Caroline to Cushman Caley. It had been a long time indeed since Lei had seen Cushman Caley so interested in anything. Lei, for the greater part absorbedly selfish, had still in her make-up a measure of craftiness and discernment. It might be the discreet thing to humor him in this whim, absurd and extravagant as it was. Besides, the idea of Caley and Caroline Williams trapsing off all by themselves on a treasure hunt—

"Oh, I don't mind," answered Lei with cold condescension. "I'll have up my check for fifty thousand to-morrow morning."

Caroline Williams explained the plan to Meenie Martin. Then she handed him over three certified checks, aggregating one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

"You're to have a week the start of us, Martin," said Caroline. "You hide these checks, and hide them good and hard. Give us a good, stiff game while we are at it. You're not to hide them anywhere about here. 'Way off somewhere, wilder place the better. And try to get up some good hocuspocus directions for finding the treasure like pirates do. You know, Martin, 'ten paces from the big, gnarled tree you'll find the dead man's bones.' Something like that. You get that, don't you, Martin?"

Yea, verily, Meenie Martin got it. He took a good, deep breath, thumped one clenched hand into the palm of another with a whack, grinned expansively.

"Cush Caley says for you to go to the bank in New York, draw what expense money you'll need. Don't be afraid of spending a dollar, Martin. Hire any help you may need, charter a boat, automobile, anything. Make this a good game, Martin."

Caroline regarded him earnestly.

"I'm banking on you, Martin; banking on you strong, to hide this treasure in such a place and manner that Cushman Caley for once in his life will get some action. You understand?"

Eenie McGiffert sat in the little, dingy back room in the rear of the plumbing shop. Jake Steener, who had succeeded to the proprietorship of the shop, was thumping and hammering away in exactly the same manner that she had heard her father, and, latterly, Meenie Martin hammer. She just couldn't stand it any longer. She was going out, hunt work, though Meenie Martin had admonished her to do nothing of the sort, at least not for a time.

Eenie, who had had a bit of a crying spell, was dabbing at her eyes when the low-topped door opened.

"Pack up your duds, Eenie," boomed a familiar voice. "Pack up your duds and so forth. We're going. Action, Eenie, like Klondyke says, action!"

"Going, Meenie; going where?"

"Pack your duds. We're going—to Uri Upo Island, where the pandang grows, and where you can't get nothing in your shoes but pearls. Where the pandang grows. I got the lettuce right here to pay the fare and everything."

Meenie Martin, his ruddy face luminous as the morning sun, was holding up to view a roll of bills as thick as his wrist.

"Action, Eenie, like Klondyke says; action! We're going!"

Eenie flew to packing. Her few belongings she thrust into a battered papier mâché suit-case that her father had used to carry his models in. She exclaimed aloud when in a corner of a dresser-drawer she ran onto the little stone taboo image that Sailor Thompson had left with her father.

Uri Upo was where the pandang grew. Uri Upo was where a teapotful of pearls were hidden. The little, hideous stone taboo, Thompson had said, was the only existing key to the hiding-place.

She packed the stone taboo into the suit-case, wrapping it securely in the folds of some garments.

Meenie Martin visited the shop for a moment. With Steener's consent, he cut off a four-inch length of galvanized iron pipe, threaded it at both ends. Into this bit of pipe he thrust the tightly rolled certified checks, screwed the caps into place, put the pipe in his pocket.

"Ready, Eenie?"

They entered a taxi, sped away toward one of the ocean docks at the foot of a street below the Twenties.

CHAPTER III.

LONG PIG.

JAKE STEENER, when the door leading from the street opened, turned to greet an expected customer. His feet still resting on the walk without, a man leaned his body through the door opening as though it might be a discreet precaution to have a look before entering. The visitor had cunning little green eyes, and a prodigious nose.

"You hain't him," remarked the caller ambiguously. "No, you hain't him."

The stranger advanced his foot across the threshold, entered. "No, you hain't him. Where is he? And where's the little girl called Eenie, and the big hulk, Meenie?"

Jake Steener shook his head. Dan McGiffert was dead. Eenie and Meenie, three days before, had packed their belongings, departed, whither Mr. Steener did not know.

Mr. Thompson jerked his head toward the low-arched door through which issued sounds of some culinary activity.

"We've moved in," explained Mr. Steener. "That's Mrs. Steener hacking cabbage."

"You sure they, that is Eenie and Meenie, didn't leave nothing for me. They didn't say?"

Steener had no objection in the least to Mr. Thompson having a look. And Mr. Thompson had a look, in every closet, drawer, every possible hiding-place.

It wasn't there. The little taboo image was gone.

"It's gone," confided Thompson in a lugubrious voice, "my little image worth millions. I knew when I wakes up on that

South American wind-jammer my luck had blowed its clues. Sure, I did. I looks down at my feet. I'd went and put on one sock wrong side out. Never knew it to fail. Anything grievous happen to sea-farin' folks, nine times out of ten, somebody has got a sock on wrong side out."

Mr. Thompson, with something the miserable appearance of a moulting bird, took his way down-street, tacked toward the waterfront.

The little taboo was gone. Dan McGiffert dead; Eenie and Meenie gone. Also his interest in the McGiffert valve was gone. He had pledged the stock for a temporary loan of ten dollars. Failing to take up the loan for the simple reason that he was some thousands of miles away, the stock had been sold.

Forced to tack to starboard by a tangle of swarthy children playing upon the sidewalk, Thompson brushed against a shop-window in which were displayed a number of plaster of Paris images.

"You buya the little ange'?" queried the watchful proprietor, who was standing in the doorway.

No, Mr. Thompson didn't care to buy any angel. But he stood a while looking in at the window.

"You make them images?" asked Thompson.

"Sure," replied the man volubly. "I make the ange', the little shepherd, the little dog so. You buya?"

Thompson shook his head. Then he glanced up at the street number of the shop, walked on.

Presently he veered into a saloon. Beside the lunch-counter stood a blackboard upon an easel. On the board Thompson began to read half aloud the wants of various ship's masters. Fo'c's'le hands were wanted for a South American trader. A Liverpool grain ship required able hands. A tramp steamer needed a bosun. A sea-going yacht required able seamen for an indeterminate cruise.

Two other sea-faring men stood beside Thompson. One of the sailors pointed to the line of writing touching the sea-going yacht.

"Stanch enough ship," remarked the sailor who, apparently, had visited the yacht to inquire about a berth. "Stanch enough —pay all right—prog would be good—but not for me. Don't know where she's going. I want to know how long between drinks. Not for me."

Mr. Thompson, observing the wharf number at which the sea-going yacht was berthed, departed.

The first officer of the yacht, which was called the Giaour, looked Thompson over with approval. This man was a sailor all right. The mate was sorry, but he couldn't tell Thompson the destination, length of the voyage.

The mate asked the sailor his name.

"My name's Thompson, Billethead Thompson they call me."

Mr. Thompson grinned, caressed the great nose. The mate laughed, for the sailor wit of him at once caught the significance of the sobriquet, "Billethead."

Ships that have no figurehead have a timber built into the prow called a billethead. Resemblance between Mr. Thompson's prodigious nose and the billethead of a ship had conferred upon Thompson his familiar appellation.

But Billethead protested that he didn't want to sign unless he knew where he was going.

"You hang around," prompted the mate, who knew a sailor when he saw one, "you hang around. Maybe, any minute, we'll know where we're bound."

So Mr. Billethead Thompson hung around.

Lei Lancaster, a bit uncomfortable for all her cool aloofness, sat watching Caroline Williams and Cushman Caley. Cush and Caroline had their heads close together. They were poring over a map of the Atlantic coast.

"This is the beauty of the scheme," enthused Caroline. "We don't know where Martin will cache the treasure."

Caroline paused to explain that "cache" was an Alaskan term, meaning to "hide."

Cushman Caley scanned the map with speculative interest. Cushman Caley at last had caught the spirit from Klondyke, and was yearning for action.

"I hope he plants it good and plenty," said Cush. "I wonder where—"

"He'll plant it all right," returned Caroline confidently. "You know, except for his red face and hair, he's a lot like Skamokawa George. He'll plant it, never fear."

They they began just for fun to guess where Martin would select a hiding-place. Caley thought it might be Bois Bubert, Nantucket.

"Poolie!" exclaimed Caroline. "Poolie is Alaska Indian for 'piffle.' Don't you ever think Bois Bubert or Nantucket. I bet he goes as far as Florida Keys, maybe Bahama, Porto Rico."

"I wish the week was up," remarked Caley. "I'm crazy to take up the scent."

Caley made some business of sniffing the sofa cushion, bloodhound-wise.

Finally the letter did come. It had been mailed right in New York. The envelope bore the return of a firm of plumbers' supplies with whom Martin had made arrangements to mail the letter upon an appointed day.

Cushman Caley's hands fairly shook as he tore open the envelope, spread the letter:

"Mr. Cushman Caley and Mrs. Klondyke Williams."

Mr. Martin had ignored Lei Lancaster in his salutation.

MR. CUSHMAN CALEY AND MRS. KLONDYKE WILLIAMS:

I am going to hide the treasure on the Island of Uri Upo, in the South Seas. It hain't but seven thousand miles from New York. Uri Upo is somewhere near Tahiti. You can find Tahiti on the map. Come to Tahiti. I'll leave a letter in the English hotel at Tahiti telling you what to try to do next. I hired a assistant treasure-hider like you said. It's E. McGiffert, best treasure-hider I could find.

Yours for treasure finding,
MEENIE MARTIN.

Lei Lancaster burst into derisive laughter.

"Absurd," she shrilled. "I wouldn't take the trip for thrice the whole bet."

"Well, Old Lady Lancaster, I will," rejoined Caroline Williams. "Lancaster, you're a dead one. I'd go through now if the bet was to find an overcoat for a flea on the top of Mount McKinley. I'll stick."

Caley pulled out the atlas, ran his finger down the Atlantic coast, through the Panama Canal, west, south into the vast Pacific.

"I'll stick, too," said Cushman Caley.

Lei Lancaster gave Caroline a malevolent glance. Just a scheme of the designing Alaska widow to get Caley away to herself.

"Oh, well," said Lei condescendingly, "I agreed, so I'll stick, too. But it is positively absurd. And we'll wish we were out of it. Mark my word."

Caroline was staring at the map. Slowly a comprehension of what the journey ahead really meant came to her consciousness. She laughed aloud, clapped her hands.

"Great!" she exclaimed. "*Skookum, hivu skookum.* I knew he was a live one. Skamokawa himself couldn't have beaten that. *Skookum!*"

The Giaour at once got up steam, proceeded to New York to outfit. Captain Fremming reported to Caley that he was having difficulty in signing on a full crew, as the men wanted to know where they were going, the length of the voyage.

At noon of the day they had elected to sail, Caley sent word to Fremming that they were bound for the South Seas, but couldn't say how long the journey would prove.

The mate came to the rail, whistled for Billethead Thompson, who sat on a bale hard by.

"South Seas, Billethead," said the mate.

"South Seas!"

Mr. Thompson tossed the enormous nose, snorted.

"I'll sign," said Thompson, and did.

"When do we weigh, Mr. Jern?"

"Four bells, first night watch," replied the mate.

"I'll be here," answered Thompson, hurrying down the wharf.

The hour was shortly after twelve o'clock noon. Four bells, first night watch, was ten o'clock. He had ten hours—ten hours.

Billethead hunted up the shop of the maker of little angels, shepherds and dogs. For the guidance of the Italian sculptor, he drew rude sketches. Again and again the Italian tried, modeling in plastic wax.

Finally he had it, a finger-sized image of a man's body, clothed in a loin cloth only, and having the head of a mastiff dog.

The Italian cast the mold in plaster. Billethead, who had gone down-street to where repairs were being made in a sidewalk, returned with a handful of dry concrete.

The Italian mixed the concrete, filled the mold. The result was almost perfect, a very nearly exact replica of the taboo god image that Billethead had left in the keeping of Eenie McGiffert.

Billethead paid the Italian, pocketed the image, collected his dunnage-bag at the boarding-house, hurried to the wharf, walked up the gangplank, and down the companionway to the Giaour's fo'c's'le.

The second day out of New York Cushman Caley, Lei, and Caroline were bunched up in the lee of the afterhouse, poring over maps, charts, reading the pilot book. Uri Upo Island did not show upon the charts. The pilot book, however, made mention of it.

Caley read what the pilot book had to say about Uri Upo, then hastened to lay the book aside. But Caroline Williams thrust an obtrusive finger between the pages, demanded a look. Caley, who didn't want the girls to see what the book had to say about Uri Upo, reluctantly turned the volume over to Caroline, who read aloud.

Uri Upo was a remote island off Tahiti. It was visited once a year usually by traders, who bought up copra, beche de mer. Uri Upo was in the hurricane belt, was surrounded by highly dangerous reefs, was inhabited by natives decidedly unfriendly. Uri Upo was one island that had steadfastly refused to permit a missionary to remain upon its shores.

Lei Lancaster turned pale. Caroline Williams chuckled gleefully. Caroline had been more than vindicated. When it came to treasure-hiding, Meenie Martin was assuredly the goods. Skamokawa George himself could have done no better.

"But they are cannibals," protested Lei Lancaster.

"Good thing you're skinny, Lei," returned Caroline cattishly.

Cush and Caroline then prattled on at a great rate, discussing Uri Upo, what it would look like, what sort of a place the worthy Mr. Martin would select as a hiding-place for the treasure.

Until the bell tinkled for luncheon they talked. Then they arose from the steamer-chairs, went below.

As the heads of the treasure-hunters disappeared down the companionway the enormous nose and the boiled peas eyes of Billethead Thompson came into view about the corner of the afterhouse.

Sinister indeed was the expression upon the face of Sailor Thompson. He expectorated violently over the rail, stood looking at the three vacant steamer chairs.

"Uri Upo, hey! Now, dang if they do! Douse me!"

After having passed the Panama, and into the long swells of the open Pacific, the Giaour got badly off her course.

Skipper Fremming, an able navigator, shortly discovered that something had happened to the compass in the binnacle. Something had happened to the magnets in the compass that corrected the deviation. Two or three of the magnets were missing.

This corrected, the error in the course rectified, there began a program of annoying, delaying accidents. Scudding now under a full carry of canvas, backstays began to fetch away. The sea cocks were discovered to be open. The bearings of the auxiliary engines got hot from grit that had been dropped into the bearings.

Fremming, capable and resourceful, repaired one defect after another, but kept the Giaour faring on steadily upon her way.

The rule of the sanctity of the pilot house was not strictly observed aboard the Giaour. Caroline Williams visited the wheelhouse frequently; in fact had stood her several tricks under the eye of Fremming, the first officer, or Billethead Thompson.

Billethead blinked his little, green eyes at Caroline, bobbed the toucan nose, invited her in. With clumsy subterfuge he brought the conversation around to the matter of the voyage's objective.

"They hain't no good scenery around Uri Upo," he declared solemnly. "I been there. That is, I kind of warped by there. Scenery no good. Besides—"

Billethead looked furtively about him, laid the flat of his hand alongside his nose.

"Mrs. Williams, you ever see any long pig on the bill of fare?"

"Long pig!"

"Yeah, long pig."

"Long pig; what's long pig?"

"Long pig is a human, cooked into a kettle, or et raw, whichever you likes best."

"Now, now, Mr. Thompson," Caroline returned, "you're trying to frighten me. That cannibal stuff is a joke. I've read a bit. The cannibals are all civilized now."

"On the surface maybe," argued Thompson, "just on the surface. There they're just like white folks, civilized on the surface. You ever think, Mrs. Williams, when you're a passing down the street all peaceable like, how maybe in the back room of the quietest house cruel men is betting their wives' last teakettle into a poker game? So with them savages that you think is civilized. They twitter a hymn, say the golden text, then lay a course back into the jungles and eat—long pig."

Many and striking were the arguments that Billethead Thompson advanced why the Giaour should not heave to off Uri Upo. Caroline in whimsical mood studied the old sailor, wondering, speculating why he should be so averse to going to Uri Upo.

Finally the Giaour made into Papiete, the harbor of Tahiti. At the English hotel Cushman Caley found the letter left by Meenie Martin. Caley brought the letter on board unopened, summoned Caroline and Lei to attend.

Caroline Williams, her face alight with interest and enthusiasm, emerged from the salon.

"You hain't going there, Uri Upo," pleaded Billethead, who had been waiting on deck. "Scenery no good—long pig—"

"Fiddlededee, Mr. Thompson! We started for Uri Upo; to Uri Upo we are going."

CHAPTER IV.

THE VOLUNTARY WATCH.

FROM the offing Eenie and Martin observed with keen anticipation the narrow fringe of level shore land on Tahiti, the camel's hump of two high mountains in the interior, Orohena and Roniu. Carefully the steamer picked its way along the outer side of the coral reef, and at slowest speed negotiated one of the numerous openings that led to the inner harbor of Papiete.

Martin and Eenie had been advised of the passport regulations when they had bought their tickets in New York. At once, upon landing, they proceeded to have their papers vised.

Immediately upon leaving the government building Martin began looking over the swarm of natives with a view to securing a boatman. Finally he beckoned to a fine appearing, giant Tahitian.

"You speakum United States?" demanded Martin in that fool gibberish with which one is apt to address an alien.

Sure, he spoke United States. His name was Puipui, which he pronounced Poopoo. And Poopoo henceforth it was.

Poopoo had a fine, strong, good canoe with an outrigger. Poopoo would climb trees for the Raatira and his tama hine. Poopoo knew all the islands everywhere. Poopoo could outswim, outpaddle, outeat—

"You know what this is?"

Martin had brought forth a wad of the pandang fiber that she had removed from one of the McGiffert valves.

Surely Poopoo knew it. It was fiber of a pandang-tree, or the screw pine, and grew everywhere in the South Seas.

It was going to be a simple enough matter to get pandang, if pandang they ever required.

In a few moments the bargain with Poopoo was consummated. For ten francs a day he would sail, paddle in his outrigger canoe, the Raatira and his tama hine.

Martin and Poopoo purchased supplies among which Poopoo insisted upon including a live, young pig which he tied by the feet and threw squealing and protesting into the boat.

The canoe was outfitted, ready to depart, when Martin and Eenie walked toward the English hotel, calling to Poopoo that they would be with him presently. While Eenie and Martin were framing the letter of directions to Cushman Caley, Poopoo was regaling the natives with a fanciful tale of the

importance of his passengers. Martin was a famous Raatira who ruled an island called New York. The Raatira possessed forty tama hines, but had brought only this one with him.

Jointly Eenie and Martin composed the following letter:

> MR. CUSHMAN CALEY AND MRS. CAROLINE WILLIAMS:
>
> We're going to plant the treasure on Uri Upo Island like we said. It is two or three hundred miles east of Tahiti. You can tell Uri Upo by a tall pole that we'll set up with a sock or something on it. We'll leave clues here and there. Watch for clues, we mean watch for them on Uri Upo Island.
>
> MEENIE MARTIN.

Poopoo paddled the outrigger through an opening in the reef, flung out the matting sail. The craft, showing a surprising amount of speed, beat away to the eastward.

The transition from daylight to darkness is sudden in the islands of the Southern Pacific. There is hardly any perceptible twilight.

All at once it was night, and Eenie and Martin disposed themselves for some sleep. Poopoo said he would sail on through the night, take his rest the following day when the Raatira could hold the paddle.

But with her back against a sharp-edged thwart, Eenie found it difficult, almost impossible to rest.

Suddenly she felt a slight movement at her side. The blanket that she had thrown over the battered suit-case was moving. Then the suit-case moved.

Poopoo, behind her, on hands and knees, had drawn the suit-case to him. Deftly he undid the strap fastener. She could hear a gentle rustling sound as his slim fingers explored the contents.

Then she heard Poopoo draw a sharp breath. A match flared, was almost at once thrown over the side.

Again a smothered exclamation from the Tahitian. Cautiously he moved the suit-case back to its former place, tossed the blanket over it.

Finally Eenie did sleep a very little. Eventually morning came.

As a part of their outfit, Eenie and Martin had brought along a folding, tiny stove with a condensed alcohol burner. Eenie proceeded to make a cup of coffee. Poopoo took for his breakfast the milk of a coconut and a slice of white-man bread. Then he turned over his little trinket of a compass to Martin, handed the white man the paddle, crawled to the prow of the canoe, laid down, and was almost immediately asleep.

"You didn't tell Poopoo exactly the island we're going to, did you, Meenie?"

"No. I just tells him straight east of Tahiti. I thought better not tell him, at least not until we're nearly there. He'd talked around, maybe, and it's just as well not to tell too much. Why?"

Eenie pointed to the suit-case.

"Last night Poopoo went through the suit-case. He found the little taboo image. I heard him exclaim when he ran onto it. He struck a match. I know he was looking at the taboo because he put it back in a different place. He didn't move the iron pipe with the treasure. It was right where I put it."

Martin thought the episode meant nothing. Poopoo, a native, had curiosity to see what the white folks had in their grip. That was all.

But Eenie thought differently. All day she pondered the circumstance. While Martin was occupied with steering the canoe, gazing out upon the islands upon either hand, she removed from the suit-case both the tiny taboo image and the iron treasure pipe. Unscrewing one of the caps from the pipe, she thrust the taboo within, screwed the cap back into place. When Martin, toward evening, crawled forward to awaken Poopoo, she whisked her skirts, hid the bit of pipe in her stocking.

Poopoo, from having at first evinced not the slightest interest in the objective of the journey, now began to ply Martin with questions. Were the *papalangi*—strangers—going to Maitea Island? That was a fine island with a lot of scenery everywhere. Not Maitea? Then Fakarava Atoll? Not Fakarava Atoll? Where?

"Just straight on east," replied Martin. "Never mind where, Poopoo, you'll get your pay—ten francs a day. What you care where?"

But Poopoo very obviously did care. His halo thatch of hair which was bleached to a sickly senna color by the weekly application of dry lime, he rubbed and worried with nervous fingers until it stood erect upon his head giving him the appearance of just having seen a ghost.

Finally, as the leagues piled up astern of the outrigger, it became impossible to longer conceal the identity of the place for which they were bound. The shape, relative locations of the islands drawn upon the little map by Snootey Thompson gave warning that Uri Upo surely lay not far ahead.

Then Martin told the boatman that they were bound for Uri Upo.

Great drops of sweat stood forth on Poopoo's mahogany countenance. The native rolled his black eyes as one in a mortal seizure. He laid his trembling hand to the paddle haft, gave the canoe a violent sheer.

Uri Upo! Never! It was a devil-devil place. A son of Poopoo's mother's sister had been there once, had seen the Uri Upoans employ a live, human body as a roller upon which to launch a great war canoe. This, of course, had broken the poor wretch's bones quite to bits. The Uri Upoans had gathered up the groaning fellow, had baked him to a nice turn in an underground oven. Uri Upo! Never!

Martin reached a muscular hand, seized the tiller paddle, restored the canoe to its course.

And there he held the canoe, though Poopoo told of the great sharks that infested the waters about Uri Upo, sharks as long as the canoe, sharks that, if denied their daily ration, sprouted legs and feet, walked up the beach and helped themselves.

Uri Upo lay just ahead. The chart drawn by Snootey Thompson showed a dot of an island nestling between a crescent-shaped island on the port side, a star-shaped island to starboard. All about it the foam of breakers piled itself in lacy billows. A stretch of golden sand lay along the beach. Fifty yards back from the shore line rose a dense mass of palms, their graceful, drooping fronds mingling with the delicate pattern of the giant fern.

A distance down the island there showed a lap in the breakers that marked an opening in the protective, outer, coral reef. With quaking hand Poopoo guided the canoe through this opening into the still lagoon that lay between the atoll and the island proper.

Then, suddenly, night descended. Careful to avoid any betraying noise, Poopoo lowered the mat sail, paddled the canoe until the prow grated softly upon the sands.

Upon the soft sands Martin and Eeenie spread their respective beds, and slept profoundly. Poopoo had elected to sleep in the canoe which he anchored just off shore with a stone anchor.

Poopoo couldn't sleep. His head was constantly bobbing above the gunwale while he looked, listened. Once he hauled in the stone anchor, shoved the canoe ashore. On hands and knees he crept to the sleepers. His slim hands located the battered suit-case where it lay near Eenie's head. Thoroughly he went through the suit-case, turning over every garment, pinching them between thumb and finger.

What Poopoo sought he found not. Eenie McGiffert had hidden it well.

With morning, Martin arose, stood looking over the island as a discoverer might examine a new found demesne. At one end of the island arose a number of bald, rocky peaks. At the other grew five detached clumps of tall cocoa palms. Between the peaks and the palms there was a depression made by an inland lagoon, as Martin discovered—a lagoon that communicated with the waters of the atoll by a single, narrow passage. The water of the inland lagoon was crystal clear, and through it flashed myriads of brilliantly colored fish with lacy tails and fins, blue, green, gold, scarlet.

"Eenie," said Martin to the girl who still slept soundly. "Eenie, where's the treasure?"

Only half awake the girl fumbled about beneath the blanket which she had drawn over her, handed out the bit of sealed iron pipe. Promptly she fell asleep again.

What latent bucaneering spirit existed in the soul of Meenie Martin expanded proudly as he walked the edge of the lagoon, looked away to the clumps of palms, to the sheer cliffs of rocks. As he gazed over the

beautiful, tropical island, he recalled the abjuration of Caroline Williams to hide the treasure in good old pirate fashion, in such a manner as to enable one to leave mysterious, baffling, hocus-pocus directions for the finding thereof.

After a considerable time Martin returned. Poopoo had come ashore. Eenie was up and had the little canned-heat stove going. They had breakfast.

Poopoo immediately climbed back into his canoe to repair the edge of the mat sail that was coming unraveled.

"I've hid it, Eenie," Martin informed her. "I hid it good. Talk about hocus-pocus, pirate directions, I—"

Eenie stared at him blankly.

"You've hid it! You mean you've hid the tube?"

"Yeah! Sure!"

"Hid it? Just as it was? You didn't open it?"

"No. Sure not. Why?"

Eenie began to laugh hysterically.

"Then you've hidden the little taboo, too. I'd put it in the tube, screwed the cap back on."

The lower jaw of Meenie Martin jarred loose, hung pendulous.

"I," he stammered. "I—I don't know as it matters. Anyway, she's hid good, I'll tell you—the treasure and the taboo too. Hid good is right. Klondyke will have no roar coming. It don't matter. They hain't a chance in the world that Snootey's wild spiel about that taboo wasn't a fake. It don't matter. Come on, I'll show you."

To the edge of the lagoon Martin led the girl. Then he pointed to five rock pinnacles at one end of the island, to four distinctive palm clumps at the other.

"I've hid the treasure, Eenie," said Martin, "half-way between two striking objects. See if you could figure out the dope if them directions was given to you and no others. Half-way between two striking objects."

Slowly her gaze traveled over the stretch of the island. A moment she glanced at the rock pinnacles. Then she scanned the clumps of tall palms.

"The rocks," she offered. "and the palms."

"Yeah. You're getting warm. But which special rock, and which special palm clump? Get the idea, Eenie? More combinations there than a policy game. Maybe the treasure is between the first rock and the second palm clump, or the last rock and the first palm clump. Get that?"

Eenie looked first at the palms, then at the rocks.

"You see, Eenie, between certain of the rocks and certain palms the hiding-place would be on land. But between the furthest rock and the nearest palm—get that—the furthest rock, the nearest palm, there she's hid, and that means square in the middle of the lagoon where she's the narrowest, and the deepest. Get that?"

The lagoon, Eenie noted, was something the shape of an hour-glass in all probability had been, years and years before, two lagoons.

They stood upon the bank, gazing down into the crystal clear water. The bottom of the lagoon was covered with shells of every hue, that showed from between the slender stems of green and scarlet alga and seaweed.

As they gazed a long, gray body floated lazily into view, turned, disclosed the curved gash of a mouth that opened well back from the tip of the creature's snout.

Martin stared after the thing as Eenie clutched his arm. Then he began to laugh none too mirthfully.

"Klondyke won't have any roar over this job of treasure hiding," he said. "No. This treasure is hid all right, with a volunteer guard on the job. That there is a shark, Eenie. I seen one once before, in a big tank at the Battery. That boy is a shark."

Sharks in the lagoon where the treasure was hidden.

The sudden consciousness of what grave danger now confronted those in the search for the hidden treasure struck them simultaneously.

"If it wasn't for Klondyke," said Martin, his face hardening; "if it wasn't for Klondyke being in on it, I—"

Eenie shook her head. Even though a multimillionaire who had never worked an hour owned the patent over which her

father had toiled the best years of his life; even so, that didn't justify murder.

"Well, anyway," argued Martin, "we'll be sticking around here. They're just as apt to find out about them sharks as we were. If they do go to diving into the lagoon, admitting that they figure out the hocus-pocus pirate directions, why then we can amble up and tell 'em they'd better lay off that Kellerman stuff."

This argument appeared to be reasonable. Eenie seated herself beside Martin on the lagoon bank, and the latter drew out a small note-book and a pencil. Presently the hocus-pocus, pirate directions for finding the treasure were completed. The treasure lay half-way between two striking objects, said the directions, to which Martin could not resist adding, "Go to it."

"Now we'll fold this paper, tie it around a pole, set the pole up on the beach like we said in our letter we left at Papiete. You got a extra stocking you can spare, Eenie?"

She nodded her head, yes.

Along the beach Martin ran onto a pole that had been washed into the atoll — a pole that looked as if it might some time have served as the boom for a native sailing canoe.

He picked up the pole, and together they made their way back to where they had camped for the night.

The canoe was no longer there, and Poopoo was gone.

Martin began to sniff. Presently he touched Eenie's shoulder, pointed across the bay to a neighboring island, from the shore of which ascended a spiral of smoke.

Poopoo had deserted his charges. On the shore of what the native seemed to consider a safer, more salubrious isle, Poopoo had built a fire, had heated stones, and was cooking the pig preparatory for a *rahi amu*, which is to say, a feast.

"Smells good," observed Martin. "Wonder if he'll bring us a hunk when it's ready?"

Side by side they stood staring across the space of waters that separated them from the renegade Poopoo. Eenie turned at a sound, gave a piercing scream.

Down the slope of sand walked five brown savages, short spears in their hands, their faces tattooed hideously.

CHAPTER V.

DOG'S HEAD.

SILENTLY the five natives gathered about the treasure hiders. One that appeared to be in command pointed to the suit-case, little stove, blankets that lay upon the beach. The native gathered up the belongings of the white folks in his arms, started for the trail that opened into the pandang bush.

The islander who seemed to be in command, grinned expansively at Martin and Eenie, disclosing two rows of teeth that had been discolored by the chewing of a species of betel nut. The grin, apallingly hideous though it was, nevertheless reassured the wayfarers as they took up the march in the midst of the Uri Upoans.

The trail, proceeding directly inland from the beach, presently skirted a stretch of swampy, low-lying ground covered with a dense growth of mangrove, a curious tree that seemed all roots that sprung from the branches everywhere, fastened themselves to the soil like the banyan.

After traversing a distance of perhaps half a mile, the narrow trail suddenly widened, entered upon an open area dotted with conical-shaped grass houses that looked like old-fashioned bee-hives. From the doorways of the huts poured children, women, the former stark naked, the latter garbed only in a short skirt called the lava-lava.

After a few moments, as befitted the dignity of the male, men began to appear in the low doors of the huts, sauntered forward to inspect the arrivals.

The native in charge of the party that had escorted the white folk from the beach brought his retinue to a stop before the largest hut of the village, placed a conch shell to his lips, blew a shrill blast.

From the doorway of the imposing hut walked a being with the body of a white man, but with the most monstrous head and face ever seen outside a book of horrors.

The man's face was the width almost of

two normal faces. The eyes were almost hidden in folds of flesh which puffed up from below. Great jowl-like cheeks depended from either side, drawing the mouth into a grotesque curve. The being's countenance, with but little aid from the imagination, was the face of a mastiff dog.

In the native tongue, Uri Upo means "dog's head." Uri Upo was the name of the island, and Uri Upo the name and title of the white-skinned monster that ruled it.

Her station attested by the fineness of the lava-lava that she wore, by the fact that an extraordinarily handsome native girl walked just behind her gently waving a palm frond fan, an inordinately fat woman came waddling to the fore, bent her obese body to gaze insolently into the faces of the captives. This was Mahae, wife of the high chief of Uri Upo. Giggling, twisting, and turning affectedly, a half-caste girl crowded in beside Mahae. The girl, Nui, daughter of Mahae and the dog-faced chief, reached to feel the texture of Eenie's gown.

Chief Uri Upo opened his thick lips, and a booming command sounded.

"Search them!"

Searched they were, to the flaming indignation of Eenie McGiffert, who resoundingly slapped one of the spear-armed natives when he dropped to his knees, began padding about her person with his hands.

Chief Uri Upo spoke a name sharply, "Ataloa," and the handsome girl fan-waver deserted Mahae's side to complete the operation of searching the white woman.

Ataloa's hunt resulted in one handkerchief and one little vanity case containing a tiny powder puff. The husky spearman who fingered through Martin's pockets held up to exhibit the usual knife, key ring, pack of cigarettes.

Sternly Uri Upo directed Ataloa and the spearman to search again.

Nothing. What they sought they found not at all.

"You'd better hoist it, young fellow," said Uri Upo in harsh, white sailor vernacular. "Better, I say."

"Hoist what?"

"You don't know what? A knowing chap, hain't you? Just like Thompson to pick a smart one. But it won't do."

"Thompson! You mean the Thompson—"

Martin clenched his fist, made a grimace.

Eenie gave him a reproachful glance for having betrayed his surprise at mention of the name of the man with the big nose.

A moment Martin and Eenie stood staring at one another. At any rate, the fantastic yarn of Snootey Thompson hadn't been all lies. The King Uri Upo did know Sailor Thompson, appeared to remember him, however with no special symptom of affection.

Now Martin was on his guard, and proceeded to match his East Side cunning with the sharp wits of the king of Uri Upo. Martin admitted that he knew a sailor Thompson, but couldn't imagine that it would be any one known to the island chief. Innocent enough, Martin protested, was the quest upon which himself and the white girl had come to the South Seas, for no other reason than to find a certain shrub.

"Why, all about here—"

Eeni gave him a warning glance. Just as well not say what shrub. Cushman Caley, owner of the packingless McGiffert Valve, would soon be along.

"All about here—what?" demanded Uri Upo. "What shrub?"

"Oh, just a shrub."

"This Sailor Thompson you say you knew, did he mention this island, any treasure, any, any key to, say, a hiding-place?"

Martin evaded the chief's scrutiny. Of course Snootey Thompson had mentioned exactly that.

"Never paid much attention to what Thompson did say," answered Martin. "Always drunk, mostly, Thompson was."

The chief studied Martin shrewdly for a moment, waved his hand, spoke some words in the native tongue.

At once the five spearmen approached, pointed for Martin and Eenie to precede them. Into a grass-thatched hut the treasure-hiders were conducted.

Save for the curious natives who came to look in at the door and stare at the strangers, Meenie and Eenie had the place pretty much to themselves. A distance from the front of the hut a guard paced back and forth, but his demeanor indicated that he

considered surveillance over the prisoners a matter not to be taken too seriously.

Presently the thick-lipped half-caste, Nui, came and insolently ordered two native girls away from the door of the prison hut. Nui entered importantly, stood and looked Eenie over from head to foot.

"You know," said Nui gloatingly, as if she relished the taste of the tidings, "you know if you try to get away the spearmen will kill you. I heard my mother, Mahae, say it."

Nui took another feel of Eenie's dress, motioned for the white girl to turn her head so that royalty might see how the white girl's coiffure was effected.

Presently Nui walked from the hut, leaving the prisoners to themselves.

Martin sat cross legged upon a mat thinking of many things. One was that he had already had his fill of treasure hiding. But he didn't voice the thought.

"We got to beat it, Eenie," said he instead. "When it gets dark—I know I can make the swim to where Poopoo is camped. Well, when I cross up with Poopoo, he'll be glad all right to fetch back that canoe and pick you up. We'll sail back toward Tahiti a ways, stop on some island, watch for Caley and Klondyke, tell 'em it's all off with the treasure hunt. They won't loose anything. Those checks are only paper."

Eenie gazed at Martin in admiration. To relate the truth, Eenie had experienced a decidedly panicky sensation over the situation in which they found themselves, but Martin's cool assurance went far to dissipate her fears.

All right. It was agreed. They would escape. She would hide at the westernmost end of the island, wait for Martin and Poopoo to come with the canoe.

The pretty fan-waver, Ataloa, brought to the prison hut milk of green coconuts, some pinkish stuff in two coconut shells, some baked yams that weren't bad at all. The pinkish stuff was "poi," universal dish of the islands of the Pacific. Ataloa smiled warmly at Martin, gave Eenie a nod, then departed.

And then the treasure-hiders waited for night.

And night came suddenly. Presently the noises of the village began to die away. All was quiet save the shuffle of the naked feet of the guard pacing back and forth.

Martin thrust his head from the open door of the hut to look, listen.

The guard had come to a pause. Martin could hear the sibilant sound of a whisper, discern a second form in the darkness. Some one was approaching the hut.

Martin retreated on hands and knees back into the hut's interior. There sounded a warning "shshs!" Some one was crawling into the hut.

"It's me," said a low voice. "Don't speak out loud. I came to talk about the little taboo."

King Uri Upo was paying the captives a surreptitious visit.

"I know chances are big you've got it," said the chief, still speaking in a guardedly low tone. "Chances are big you've got it, or know where it is. No use trying to hedge about it. Just hand it over. In ten minutes I'll have you out of here safe enough."

Martin felt Eenie's warning grasp upon his arm. Her woman's intuition scented treachery. If Uri Upo was acting in good faith, why come sneaking alone, at night, with his proposition?

"But I tell you I hain't got it," protested Martin.

"You do know what I'm talking about, though, don't you?" countered the white chief knowingly.

"I think I've seen what you're talking about," admitted Martin. "But I hain't dead sure."

The chief suddenly left off the inquisition, crawled to the door opening of the hut. From the beach came sounds as of the grating of a canoe prow, the shuffle of feet through the sands.

Uri Upo slid out into the darkness, was gone.

From the direction of the beach there came shortly the sound of high pitched, disputatious voices, one the thundering tones of Chief Uri Upo, the other the rasping shrill of his consort, Mahae.

A torch-bearer waving a flaming length of some resinous wood was coming toward

the prison hut attended by Uri Upo, Mahae, and half a score natives.

Angrily, Mahae summoned the white man and girl from the hut, proceeded this time to act herself as inquisitor.

"White folks, you got the taboo? No lies."

Vehemently Martin protested that they did not have the taboo.

Mahae glowered at the prisoners, the flare of the torch lighting up her savage countenance, lending it an added ferocity.

"White folks—no lies!"

Again Martin repeated his denial, he had not the taboo.

Mahae uttered a mad scream, burst forth into a torrent of native speech, the accusation and invective in which were plain enough.

She called a name, and a giant native stepped from out the shadows, flung forward into the circle of light—Poopoo.

"You say a lie! You got the taboo! A lie!"

Poopoo stood describing a circle in the soil with the great toe of his right foot. Poopoo dared not face the *papalangi,* the white Raatira and his *tama hine* whom he had been forced to betray.

"A lie," howled Mahae hoarsely. She pointed to Poopoo. "A lie! He says it, that you have the taboo god."

During this cross-examination by Mahae, Uri Upo stood to one side, regarding his consort unamiably. The household of the dog-faced one seemed to lack unity of purpose, perfection of understanding. A schism had arisen in the house of Uri Upo. The chief would like to acquire the taboo privately, very privately. Mahae greatly desired to gain it in public.

Once again Eenie's hand gave Martin's arm a warning squeeze.

"Well, we hain't got the taboo," replied Martin stubbornly.

Ensued a heated dialogue between Uri Upo and Mahae, in which the latter constantly appealed to Poopoo, who nodded his head but did not look up.

After a time the chief, Mahae, the giant guard, and Poopoo all departed, leaving the prisoners to whisper over the new developments in the game. Only the pacing sentinels now were three in number instead of one.

Martin and Eenie managed to sleep a little.

Ataloa brought them breakfast, gazed upon Martin with a new compassion.

The succeeding callers were Nui, and a toothless, wrinkled old man who had a shredded fiber brush in his claw-like hand, and some dark pigment in a coconut shell. The old fellow, comporting himself rather importantly, began to paint the chins of Martin and Eenie with the dark blue stuff in the coconut shell.

Nui stood by, watched the operation with unconcealed satisfaction.

In the far Tuamotus they have a cheerful, ancient, tribal custom which is to paint with blue paint the lower portion of the faces of victims condemned to death.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TABOO.

NO white man, it is said, understands the taboo as the South Sea Islander understands it. A devil-devil doctor decrees that no woman may walk to seaward of a certain cliff. No woman walks to seaward of the cliff. The devil-devil says that no man of a tribe may eat of a certain fish. Until the taboo upon that certain fish is annulled, that fish swims the sea unmolested.

Even the teachings of the Christian missionaries have been interpreted by the islanders to mean, simply, more taboos. Murder is taboo, and a multiplicity of wives. When a taboo were deemed unusually important, the devil-devil would carve a graven image of wood or of stone to represent it. Taboo images, handed down from father to son, acquired all the dreadful potency of the actual god to whom the taboos were sacred.

In very olden times a devil-devil brought to the island a strong taboo, made of stone. It was no larger than one's finger, was carved in image of a man with a dog's head. Uri Upo the taboo image was called, and presently the island bore the name of the darkling deity.

The island prospered, as the devil-devil said it should prosper. Many loa—pearls—were found in the lagoon, the bread fruit and the taro thrived, and no spotted sickness came upon the people.

One day a canoe put in, and a white man walked up the beach. The islanders wondered, and were frightened, for the man's body was the body of a white man, but his head was the head of a dog.

There Ross Worthington began to believe that his luck had turned. With much pomp and ceremony he was acclaimed chief, for was not his head the head of the strong little stone taboo god?

After a desperate escape from the penal colony in New South Wales, Worthington had drifted beneath the burning sun in an open boat. In the Solomons he had been all but devoured by cannibals, took refuge in a noisome swamp. There he had been marked for all his days. A mosquito bite had brought upon him the dread elephantiasis, that disease of the tropics that causes a certain tissue or feature to grow and grow out of all human proportion.

Worthington, with his monstrous dog head and face, was made welcome upon the island. The name of the island became his name, and he took as wife, Mahae, the favorite young wife of the chief who died suddenly from a mysterious knife thrust.

At once, looking upon the store of loa, or pearls, that the islanders had accumulated, Uri Upo, to call him by his new name, took possession of all the pearls, and likewise the potent stone taboo.

The years went on. More loa were recovered from the lagoons. Nui, the half-caste daughter, was born to Mahae and Uri Upo. Trading ships came in but seldom, for the island had gained an evil name. A portion of the crew of one that had landed on Uri Upo, that had attempted to cheat the islanders out of the precious loa, never returned to their ship.

Finally there came in another trading ship, twenty tons burden. The trader, a man called Thompson, a man with little, greenish eyes and a prodigious nose, feared neither the islanders nor the chief with the mastiff face. Nor, may it be added, did he fear Mahae, consort of the chief.

So plausibly did he talk with Chief Uri Upo that the tribal king was inclined to traffic with Thompson, dispose of some of the pearls.

But Mahae said no; not upon the terms proposed by Thompson, which she had astuteness sufficient to know were absurd.

But a little longer Thompson hung on. Often he would walk the beach alone with Uri Upo. Between the two there seemed to grow an understanding. Uri Upo showed the taboo image to Thompson, explained that possession of the image gave him absolute sovereignty over every one on the island save Mahae.

Then, in the night, the little schooner weighed. Uri Upo awakened to find it gone, and also the taboo image.

Uri Upo cursed and raved insanely, but his cursings were mild as compared with the general wail that went up when it became known that the little devil-devil image was gone. Now sickness, the spotted sickness would come; the taro and the bread fruit would fail.

Fearing for his kingship, Uri Upo took the tribal pearls and hid them cunningly. He took the shell of an ostrem, a worthless variety of giant oyster, placed the pearls within the shell, closed it with withes of fiber, sank the precious shell in the depths of the lagoon.

Frankly enough, withholding only the location, Uri Upo told Mahae that for safe keeping he had hidden the pearls in an ostrem shell. Mahae had grown to doubt her lord. His words were but tissues of lies. She never believed the story about the pearls, thought always that he had hidden them elsewhere than in the water of the lagoon, told this story to throw her off the track.

But it didn't matter greatly whether Mahae believed or not. Uri Upo had disposed of the pearls better than he had dreamed. With the loss of the taboo image, the old devil-devil recalled half a dozen taboos that had existed since ancient times, that now were in full force again, would remain always in force until the return of the stone image of a man with a dog's head. Among those taboo was this certain one—no one, upon pain of instant

death, might dive into the lagoon, fish for fish in its waters, or even cross it in a canoe.

To attempt to recover the pearls from the lagoon without the taboo image in his keeping to annul the ancient proscription, meant death, instant, horrible death, and Uri Upo knew that chief and all as he was, he would gain no shade of favor if he were the transgressor.

So month after month Uri Upo awaited the return of Thompson or his emissary. That he would come, or send, Uri Upo had not the slightest doubt, for there were pearls, a double handful of pearls on Uri Upo, and to their hiding-place the sailor with the big nose had the only key.

Mahae was for putting the prisoners to death at once. Uri Upo counseled delay. With their death, he argued, would be lost forever what light they might throw on the situation. Besides, the Tahitian, Poopoo, might have lied, might have been mistaken; perhaps what Poopoo claimed to have found in the white folks' belongings might not have been the taboo at all. And still, besides all these, Uri Upo insisted, the white prisoners expected other white folks to follow them in a ship. More than once the Uri Upoans had had warning from government. What if the friends of Martin and the McGiffert girl came in on a French cruiser?

So, finally, Mahae consented. The blue pigment was wiped from the faces of the condemned by Ataloa, who brought to the prison hut the glad tidings of reprieve.

"Now you go where want to," smiled Ataloa, scrubbing away at Martin's chin with a bit of tapa cloth. "Sure you go now."

Ataloa started to operate on Eenie's countenance with the tapa, but Eenie a bit ungraciously took out her own handkerchief and completed the task. Ataloa stood staring at Martin. Surely, thought the little island maid, in his own country, this beautiful man with the florid face, and the aureole of red hair would be a very great Raatira indeed. Ataloa wondered whether this girl accompanying the Raatira of the red face would be one of the wives of the white chief.

Rather reluctantly, when Ataloa decided from the queer expression on the white girl's face, that the white girl deemed her no longer welcome, Ataloa departed.

Now the liberty of the island belonged to the treasure hiders. From the hut they crawled, walked to the beach.

To Martin's surprise the long pole, with the flapping stocking at the top, the hocus-pocus, pirate directions for finding the treasure wrapped about the haft, still stood in place upon the beach.

Martin wondered if, perhaps, some islander's superstition to the effect that the pole was sort of a taboo had not stayed the hands of the Uri Upoans?

Then, his sense of humor strong, too robust perhaps, Martin began to laugh. Klondyke Williams would surely have no cause for complaint on the thoroughness with which the treasure had been hidden.

Throughout the morning Mahae and Uri Upo continued the argument over the disposition to be made of the prisoners. While she had agreed to a temporary reprieve, Mahae had by no means abandoned the determination to put the *papalangi* to death.

Mahae marshaled some formidable, indeed, from the island viewpoint, some unanswerable arguments. To these Uri Upo had but one reply, to kill the white folks was to bury forever the hope of recovering the taboo.

For hours Mahae's spear-thrusters stood by ready to do her commands. But Uri Upo's argument prevailed, and finally the chief got his consort to agree to extend the reprieve until the following sunset.

The word having gone forth that the prisoners were not to suffer the extreme penalty, at least not for a time, the attitude of the islanders toward them was one of smiling friendliness.

A toothless old fellow who possessed a vocabulary of about twenty white man words seemed to take a great interest in Eenie McGiffert. He showed her his collection of war-clubs, and half a dozen bleached skulls, the while relating the bloody history of each with smiling good nature.

Martin, a thousand fantastic projects for

escape teeming within his brain, walked down the stretch of sandy beach. No restrictions had been placed upon his movements, so he walked on to where a jutting promontory shut him off from view from the village trail. He seated himself upon a wave-worn boulder to think.

As he sat staring over the long rollers of the open Pacific, a soft scraping noise sounded behind him. He jerked his head about. From a clump of pandang bush walked forth Ataloa, her splendid body swaying gracefully, white teeth disclosed in a warm smile, in one extended hand a sprig of the gorgeous, scarlet hibiscus.

Straight to Martin she walked. Gazing up at him ingenuously, she held out the sprig of hibiscus.

"I give white man's *uraura fua* — red bloom," she said. "When like some one awful good, feel very sorry, too, give um *uraura fua*."

Martin stood staring down alternately at the beautiful red hibiscus — at the girl's smiling face and wonderful black eyes.

When Ataloa like one awfully well, and felt very sorry for them, too, she gave them a red hibiscus.

Martin wondered just why Ataloa should feel so sorry for him.

The girl's uplifted eyes devoured the white Raatira's florid face and his glory of flaming hair. A long time she stood regarding him, tilting her head to one side, then the other, as she studied his features.

Then she reached somewhat timidly, laid one brown hand upon his breast.

"You say it," she admonished earnestly; "you say it you know where taboo is, but won't tell. Some day, you say it, you go get taboo. Some day you get it, say so. Then you no die."

Little Ataloa, whose name meant "smiling pearl," was giving Martin a tip. Ataloa, maid in waiting to Mahae, enjoyed rather abundant opportunity to know whereof she spoke. And she was advising Martin to keep the Uri Upoans guessing, to stand them off, delay, temporize.

An overwhelming surge of gratitude swept over him. He took the little brown hand in his big, freckled one, gave it a squeeze, and an appreciative pat.

When, after a moment, he released her hand, she stood staring down at it, turning it over. Naively she offered it again for the white Raatira to hold, and squeeze, and pat. Ataloa gazed up at him worshipfully.

A number of Uri Upoans were coming down the beach, armed with long spears with which, now and then, one would reach and bring in a species of prawn. A native incautiously set down his bare foot upon one of the long-spined sea urchins that encumber the shores of South Sea Islands.

At sound of the native's cry, Ataloa disappeared into the pandang like a moving shadow.

Then a number rounded the promontory, caught sight of Martin. One, in a manner entirely friendly, called out to Martin that the chief and Mahae desired to have speech with him.

Slowly Martin walked down the beach, entered the trail to the village.

The interminable controversy between Uri Upo and Mahae as to the disposition of the prisoners had been renewed. Mahae had given her word of reprieve that would last until the day's sunset. Then what?

Mahae, Uri Upo, Nui, several of the old tribal counselors were seated in a semicircle. Uri Upo's bloated countenance was purple. Mahae's thick lips had turned a sickly gray under the impulse of the animal-like rage that possessed her, and her eyes smoldered like moistened match-heads in the dark.

Eenie McGiffert, who had been summoned to the inquisition, had just completed her ordeal when Martin arrived. Eenie's face was a bit pale. But she smiled resolutely at Martin, made a slight toss of her head as if to advise him that she had done their desperate cause no harm.

Eenie was the goods. Martin looked proudly upon his lifelong little pal.

Immediately, Mahae turned the torrent of her rage upon Martin. Shrieking like a very harridan, she pointed, gesticulated, lurched her fat body about spasmodically.

Uri Upo, in turn, appeared to be trying by sheer vociferation to overcome his consort's arguments. Mahae screamed, and Uri Upo roared, shook his fist at a wrinkled Kanaka counselor, who, obviously, was taking sides with Mahae.

But the earthwide domination of white blood asserted itself. One or two counselors who had agreed with Mahae, now swung their allegiance to the white chief. Again, however, Uri Upo had won no more than a stay of execution.

"You've got the taboo," accused Uri Upo, turning his mastiff-like face toward Martin. "You've got it—or know where it is. Now have a little sense. If it wasn't for me, you, you and the girl by this time—Well, you wouldn't be here. You're a fool. You don't know what's ahead for you. You've got to give up that taboo. I held out to give you time to think for the reason that you are a fool. Now, here—listen—when the sun sets three nights away, you will have laid that taboo in my hand. Listen! Three days! You bring the taboo to me. Sooner the better. Three days the absolute limit. If you don't— You'll not get off with a spear thrust. That would be too easy. Three days."

These were the words spoken by the thick lips of Uri Upo. These were the words, but some expression in the deep-set, shifty, cunning eyes said more, or less.

The council disbanded. Again Eenie and Martin were free to roam the island until the sunset of the third day. Then what—

Down the beach walked Eenie and Martin, the latter idly tossing pebbles into the water. Martin had just started to relate to Eenie the circumstance of his encounter with Ataloa, the girl's friendly warning.

Some sudden thought, the urge of gallantry within him, sealed his lips. A meeting casual enough, still the encounter with Ataloa had been personal, intimate to a degree.

Martin turned his face toward the sea, and he and Eenie walked on.

Finally they rounded the promontory, came to the exact spot where Ataloa had emerged from the pandang.

Martin had never before experienced exactly the feeling that swept over him. He felt confused, guilty. As he talked on rather aimlessly, he continued to avoid Eenie's worried, searching gaze.

Martin had not been previously aware of the fact, but a little used trail, proceeding from the village to the easternmost end of Uri Upo, opened into the pandang clump near where he and Eenie had seated themselves.

This was the trail over which Ataloa had sped to give him warning. This was the trail over which now came a second person who had occasion for private speech.

The bulky body of Chief Uri Upo broke through the shrub, came toward the boulder.

"Just a word," said Uri Upo to Martin, "you bring that taboo to me. Don't let anybody else know. Now get all clear—if you don't deliver that taboo to me, nobody but me, with the knowledge of no one else, you and the girl will never leave this island alive. Bring it to me; I'll get you away safe and sound."

Uri Upo glowered at Eenie and Martin for a moment, turned and reentered the trail.

CHAPTER VII.

MAHAE PAYS AN OLD SCORE.

PERPLEXING were the problems that presented themselves to Eenie and Martin. Even if they were able to recover the taboo, they could not deliver it to both Mahae and Uri Upo, and to whichever of the two they gave the little stone image the other, Eenie and Martin were convinced, would immediately plot, and, no doubt, execute revenge.

Besides, Eenie had learned a great many things from the old, toothless warrior who had exhibited to her his war clubs and his skulls of slain enemies. Until the material taboo were restored to tribal possession, the spiritual, religious taboo would continue to exist over the lagoon. Eenie was thoroughly convinced by the word of the old savage that to be detected in any endeavor to recover the iron pipe from the waters of the lagoon would mean for them barbarous, cruel death.

Eenie McGiffert detailed to Martin what the old skull collector had said.

"If it wasn't for Klondyke," said Martin soberly," why this would sure be a swell chance to get even with Cushman Caley.

The way it is, though, Klondyke being square as a die if I know what's what, as it is—"

Eenie shook her head earnestly.

"I've been thinking of that, too, Meenie," she said. "It wouldn't be right to coax Caley into this trap. Here is another difficulty. You notice the pole, with the flapping stocking, the note of directions still stands in place upon the beach, the signal that Caley will be watching for? Well, old toothless said it was bad luck to disturb a white man taboo, any taboo. They think the signal staff is a taboo."

"But we can pull down our own taboo," argued Martin. "Anyway, I don't see as it matters whether the signal staff stands or not. Caley will sure come in here close, anyway, the directions left at Papiete will bring him here. I don't think these natives have got the nerve to tackle a big ship like Caley's. Let Caley come on. If we can stand off Mahae until Caley gets here, we're saved. And he ought to be here soon. We had a week's start, but Caley's ship is some traveler, they say. He ought to be here soon, but I'm afraid not by sundown day after to-morrow."

Martin's face grew sober, and Eenie drew a sharp breath. Sundown day after to-morrow.

"Still, in fairness, in honesty," resumed Eenie after a moment, "I think we should pull down the signal staff. It isn't right to let Caley run into danger, in fact to lead him into it."

To this Martin agreed, making the reservation, however, that he didn't care what Caley ran into if it were not for the square Alaska widow, Klondyke.

After night had fallen, Martin crept down the beach, pulled the signal staff from the sand, removed the stocking, the note of directions, tossed the pole into the water.

Eenie McGiffert, sleeping soundly after several wakeful, worried hours, became conscious finally that some one was standing beside the sleeping-mat.

Nui, the heavy, pinguid eyelids half obscuring her wicked eyes, stood looking down insolently upon the white girl.

Nui turned, spoke a word. The natives, a man and two women, crawled into the hut. Though Eenie protested with loud screams against the indignity, she was held firmly by the man while the two women bound the white girl about with strands of some fiber, thrust a wad of the same between her jaws, tied it in place.

A hut or two removed, to which he had been assigned at his request, Martin, who had bowled over the two first natives to lay hands upon him, was being similarly treated.

The chief, Uri Upo, standing upon the rise where the trail opened to the open beach, was ordering the restoration of the signal staff.

Down the beach, an islander had found the long pole where it had drifted back to shore.

The dog-faced man eyed the naked staff, dispatched one of his subjects who ran to the hut where Eenie McGiffert lay bound and gagged, spoke a word to Nui who had remained in the hut.

Nui began to paw over Eenie's belongings, picked up a stocking, handed it to the native.

Far down in the offing showed a white sail—a sail that grew larger as it bore down upon Uri Upo Island.

The Giaour, in spite of the delays effected by the ingenious Billethead Thompson, sailing an average of two knots an hour faster than the mail steamer, had arrived much sooner than Martin had calculated would be possible.

Chief Uri Upo looked up at the signal staff, with the stocking flapping atop, thence to the oncoming ship. Then he retraced his steps to the village, whence, from all parts of the island, had come warriors armed with spears, head axes, clubs.

With sharp, decisive orders, Uri Upo disposed his men. Every covert of dense shrub screened its complement of spear-armed warriors. But not a soul showed within sight. The village huts were perfectly hidden from the sea by the tangle of pandang shrub. Uri Upo, from the offing, was a perfect picture of tropical serenity, the only sign that any human foot had ever trod its shores, the signal staff upon the beach, a woman's stocking flapping at the top.

Swiftly the Giaour came on, slowing down to half speed as the breaking line of the atoll came into sight. Then a churn showed at the cruiser's stern. She came to a stop, the anchor let go.

A work boat was lowered from the davits. A man descended the side ladder, took his place in the boat. Two seamen in uniform followed him, took up the oars.

Cushman Caley was to enjoy the honor of being first to set foot upon the treasure island of Uri Upo.

Nearer came the work boat. Finally it found the opening in the reef, swept in.

As Caley stepped out upon the golden sands, half a dozen natives ran forward, brandishing their spears. Caley and the two seamen stood, the center of a bristle of sharp points.

Uri Upo, concealed in the pandang, stepped forward, placed a conch shell to his lips, blew a reverberating blast.

From the lower end of the island a score of canoes shot forth. Immediately the Giaour was invested by armed paddlers, who circled and circled the yacht, uttering no word, but paddling as if awaiting some further signal.

Cushman Caley stood staring wildly at the dog-like countenance of the white chief.

"Just call out to your people to come in —come in peaceably," ordered Chief Uri Upo; "peaceably, and nobody will be hurt."

Caley opened his lips, but spoke no word.

"Well," added the chief impatiently, "call to them. Or I'll have 'em brought in."

His voice wabbling a trifle, Cushman Caley sent a call over the waters to the Giaour.

"Better come in," he advised. "I—I guess it's all right. Got to come in anyway."

A lifeboat was lowered away from the Giaour, and in came Caroline Williams, with Captain Fremming and four sailors.

"Everybody," said Uri Upo fiercely. "I said everybody."

Fremming and two of the sailors returned to the Giaour. The next trip to the shore the life-boat was loaded to capacity. It seemed as if everybody must have obeyed the chief's command.

Lei Lancaster, the instant that she stepped on shore, uttered a wild scream, fell to the earth, scrubbing at her wrist with a handkerchief the place where a native had seized her to help her alight.

Caroline Williams, her eyes wide with surprise, surveyed the scene, the monstrous countenance of Uri Upo, the savage array of spears, head axes, clubs.

But gamely she laughed.

"What did I tell you, Cush? Skamokawa George himself couldn't have done better. Some treasure hider."

Caley, Lei, and Caroline were conducted to the village, assigned to two huts at the lower end. Fremming and his crew were taken down beach a distance, housed in some abandoned sheds that had once been erected for the housing of a copra crew.

Mahae, having looked the newly arrived captives over critically, walked to the beach to have a closer look at the Giaour. This ship, she communed avariciously, would be surely the finest ship in the whole world. What shiny brass, and sleek, painted sides.

A long-forgotten, still latent ambition stirred within the designing soul of Mahae.

Uri Upo, also from the beach, but standing near the signal staff, stood likewise, studying the trim lines of the Giaour. The canoe men, recalled by a blast of the conch, had returned to shore, had drawn the outriggers up above tide mark. Alone in the bay the Giaour rode, tugging gently at her anchor hawse.

A few moments the chief stood in thought. Then he called to a native, bade him place his canoe in the water. Uri Upo took his place in the canoe, and the paddler shot the frail craft out toward the anchored yacht.

Directing the paddler to remain by the side ladder, Uri Upo mounted, set his feet upon the snow-white decks.

Swiftly the chief went through the pilothouse, the afterhouse, on to the skipper's cabin.

Seated in the skipper's swivel chair, his feet upon the desk, a long cigar in his mouth, was a man with little, foxy eyes, and an enormous nose.

"Ahoy, Ross," coolly greeted the man with the nose.

Pausing in the doorway, the chief of Uri Upo regarded Billethead Thompson, who, after a moment, removed his feet from the desk, advanced with outstretched hand.

"Let's forget that old head-on I and you had, Ross," said Billethead ingratiatingly.

Uri Upo looked at the sailor's gnarled hand, slowly advanced his own. Then the two shook hands.

Within the skipper's cabin, Billethead and Uri Upo held swift communion. Uri Upo told of the arrival of the man and the girl, the declaration of Poopoo that he had seen the taboo in their possession, the distressing fact that no manner of threat had thus far elicited from the captives the secret of the hiding-place.

Billethead, on his part, told his story volubly, but neither frankly nor completely. Touching the matter of the old spoken taboo, to the effect that no one, on pain of death, dared investigate the waters of the lagoon without the material taboo in their possession, Billethead started to make a suggestion, came to a sudden thoughtful pause, ended by reaching his hand into his pocket.

"You say we've got to have the taboo, Uri? Well, we got it."

Thompson handed the chief the supposititious taboo fashioned by the New York sculptor.

Uri Upo took it, turned it in his hand.

"Might fool some," he said, "but not me. And it won't fool Mahae. That's why it's no good, it won't fool Mahae."

Billethead leaned forward, the boiled-peas eyes lighting with sudden cunning.

"Thrakambo, the old devil-devil doctor, he still alive?"

Uri Upo nodded his head. Thrakambo, very, very old, was still alive.

"Just kind of su'gest to Thrakambo," prompted Billethead, "to dream a new taboo, that when the taboo image is found, no woman's hand can touch it that won't wither and drop off."

Thompson leaned back, studied Uri Upo. Uri Upo repaid him with an agreeing nod. Not a bad idea.

"Then," continued Billethead, "at night we'll try for the pearls in the lagoon where you hid 'em in the ostrem shell. If we're caught projecting in the lagoon, why then we'll up and spring the taboo image. All right to dive in the lagoon, or paw around with a dredge pole if you have the image, and we sure got it. We'll spring it then, but won't let no one get to have a close look or handle it."

Again Billethead and Uri Upo took up the thread of future plans.

"Sail this ship, three of us!" exclaimed Billethead; "sure three can sail her, I, and you, and this Poopoo you call him."

The conspirators shook hands.

"To-night then," said Uri Upo, "when it's dark. All right."

Uri Upo went down the side ladder, was paddled ashore.

Straight to the hut where lived old Thrakambo went the chief. Emerging after a whispered conference, Uri Upo announced that there would be a great "*meke*," or dance feast that night at the far end of the island. Thrakambo had had a dream. Great good fortune was shortly to come upon the people of Uri Upo Island, the taboo image was to mysteriously reappear, to depart never from the island, but the hand of no woman was ever to touch the sacred image.

Swiftly traveled the glad tidings. Natives began to dig the roasting pits in which the pigs would be cooked, and there ensued a great gathering and baking of yams, the mixing of rich, two-finger poi.

With the coming of darkness the palms were lighted up by the fitful gleam of a score of cooking fires. Beneath the graceful droop of the fronds of coco and giant fern, the islanders wove in and out in the intricate figures of their tribal dances.

The *meke* at its height, Nui came to her mother's side, whispered.

Mahae, naming the six spear-men whom she wished to accompany her, withdrew, took her way along the trail. Shortly she was overtaken by Nui and the six faithful subjects.

When near the lagoon, Mahae uttered a warning whisper. Silently the little company stole on.

Where the lagoon narrowed stood the

figure of a man poised for a dive, while two other men beat the waters on either side with long sticks.

The man dove. Mahae uttered a sharp word. The six natives ran forward, seized the two men that were beating the waters. When the diver arose to the surface, him also they seized.

Angrily, Chief Uri Upo protested, held up the taboo image, but snatched it away when Mahae reached for it.

But Nui, either because she had not learned of the latest taboo declared by old Thrakambo, or because the half of her blood was fearless white, whisked the false image from her father's hand.

Instantly the weight of the trinket which was less than that of the genuine, told her the secret.

Mahae turned it over in her grasp when Nui had handed her the lying taboo. Then, contemptuously, between two heavy stones, Mahae shattered the counterfeit taboo, flung the fragments from her.

Once and forever Mahae was done with the lies and the schemes of the ex-convict, Ross Worthington.

Her six faithful retainers thrust a canoe into the water, a canoe without matting sail or paddle; a canoe in which was no drop of water or morsel of food.

Toward the east of Uri Upo is an unbroken stretch of hundreds, thousands of miles of open sea. Steadily, toward the east, for weeks the faithful trades would blow, carrying on and on any rudderless, powerless craft consigned to its keeping.

Uri Upo, Billethead Thompson, the Tahitian called Poopoo, were flung into the canoe. Willing hands shoved it free, propelled it through the opening in the reef. Slowly it drifted away, disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DIVE INTO THE LAGOON.

MAHAE, until her daughter Nui, spying, sneaking always as was the girl's habit, had detected Uri Upo in the very act of diving into the sacred lagoon, had never believed the tale that he told, of having hidden the tribal pearls in an ostrem shell sunk in the lagoon. Now she believed; for once her white lord had told the truth.

The pearls *were* in the lagoon. A magnificent rage possessed Mahae's heart as she walked back and forth upon the beach, looking first toward the taboo lagoon, then the splendid yacht riding in the bay.

Now Mahae was queen, sole queen. Alone she would rule—rule until Nui chose a husband, for it was the law of Uri Upo that no unmarried female should ever wear the ancient feather diadem.

With such a ship—a white man's ship—why Mahae could rule the Tuamotus, for surely in the whole archipelago there was no such other. With such a ship she could fare to islands afar off, barter, trade, grow rich.

But it was a white man's ship. A native canoe had a single sail of matting; the white man's ship had a dozen sails, a score so that under a full spread from afar it looked like a flock of white gulls in flight. A white man's ship. Where would Mahae find a native cunning enough to master the intracacies of all that mass of snowy canvas, the myriad spars, booms, gaffs?

Mahae turned and gazed away to the eastward. Somewhere in that vastness, Uri Upo, Thompson, and the Tahitian were wooing death as men court maidens, begging, pleading for death to come and wipe away the blood red spots that danced before their eyes, screaming, cursing, praying for death or a drop of water.

A pang of remorse tugged at Mahae's savage, benighted heart. But it was too late. Besides, Mahae had but done the will of the gods. Uri Upo had transgressed a taboo, and therefore had to die.

A moment Mahae paused in sudden wonderment. Why had not the taboo itself, the taboo of revengeful gods struck dead the impious dog-faced man the instant that his gross body had touched, defiled the waters of the sacred lagoon?

Because Uri Upo was a white man. White men, her father had told her, were liars, cheats, all knaves, but still the lords of the earth. Even the taboo dared not lay destroying hand upon a white man.

Mahae shook her head. It was all too perplexing. Of this she was sure; while the taboo itself would lay no punatory hand upon Uri Upo, she herself would have been held to a strict accounting had she not meted out instant punishment to the two whites and the Tahitian whom Nui had discovered defiling the lagoon.

And this train of thought brought Mahae inevitably to the matter of the lost taboo image. Unless the image were restored, never, never could peace, happiness, health, prosperity dwell with the people of Uri Upo.

The taboo—she must and would have the taboo. The white folks, some of them knew its hiding-place. She would have the taboo. The blood of all the captive whites on Uri Upo was not too great a price to pay for it.

Her head bent upon her bosom, Mahae walked slowly back to the village, entered the royal hut, summoned Nui.

Martin frankly enough had told Cushman Caley what had happened to the treasure; that it lay in the bottom of the lagoon along with the little taboo image.

"It's all right if it is," chimed in Caroline Williams. "It's quite all right. I'm glad I picked you for a live one and a winner, Meenie. Skamokawa—"

Caley interrupted to say that he didn't see any reason why somebody shouldn't dive in and get it. He himself was a fairish swimmer. Caroline was a good swimmer. Lei Lancaster was an especially clever performer in the water, had won a prize once in a diving contest.

"Oh, yeah," exclaimed Martin, "so I'm a good swimmer, and so is Eenie there. She learned in the New York Girls' Club. But you dassent go flopping yourself into that lagoon. It's taboo, which is the native word for 'nix.'"

Mr. Caley feared not at all any taboo. He was no devotee of the rabbit's foot. He would as soon walk under a ladder as about it.

"Sharks!" whispered Martin dramatically. "Sharks!"

Then Martin and Caley, walking apart alone, began to consider. Martin explained to his employer all that he knew of the mysterious institution known as the taboo, took upon himself the blame for the misadventure that had resulted in placing the little taboo image in the pipe with the treasure.

Martin led Caley to the narrowest place of the hour-glass lagoon, pointed into the crystal clear depths.

The whole situation, in spite of Martin's expatiations upon the sacredness of a taboo, seemed perfectly clear to Cushman Caley.

"We'll get some long sticks," said Caley, "thresh the water while one of us does the diving. I've read that that is the way to handle old man shark."

"But you dassent, you dassent," insisted Martin. "Don't you understand, if them natives catch us pawing around in here—bing!"

Caley gave Martin a lack luster glance. Together they walked back to the beach.

Caroline Williams came hurrying from the trail. Caroline, in confident, tourist fashion, had been strolling about, talking with such natives as had a few words of *beche de mer* English.

Her face was a trifle pale as she hurried to meet Martin and Caley.

"It's true!" she exclaimed. "That taboo! Even the chief! The chief, one of our crew, and a Tahitian — last night—adrift, open boat, without a bite of food or a drop of water. It's true—the taboo."

Lei Lancaster and Eenie walked up to join the group. They stood silent looking in one another's faces.

That Mahae proposed to be queen in fact was presently attested when all the white prisoners were ordered to attend in the village. If the taboo image were not produced, restored by sundown the following day, all the *papalangi* were to be placed in canoes, without oars, sails, food or water, set adrift.

As darkness fell the *suari*—drums—began to beat, summoning the islanders to a *meke* at the lower end of the island. Queen Mahae was celebrating her accession to sole power over Uri Upo.

With half a dozen long poles gathered from drift upon the beach, Caley and Martin crept silently to the lagoon. There was

a sudden, swishing tumult in the water. Caley shuddered. Martin started to exclaim, but went no further than "sh—"

"I'm to blame for this jam," whispered Martin, approaching the edge of the lagoon. "I'll make the first try."

He stripped off his outer clothing, poised himself upon a rock, while Caley began to thresh the water to one side of the spot where Martin proposed to dive.

Some one hurried up the rise. It was Caroline Williams. She seized a pole, began beating the water on the other side of the place where Martin had flung the iron pipe.

Then Eenie McGiffert came. Both girls whispered that they hadn't proposed to be left out, even if the boys had told them to stay where they were.

Martin took a look around, leaned forward, dove.

Up he came finally. Nothing.

Again he tried. Nothing.

"Look here," said Caley hoarsely. "I'm going to try."

Caroline Williams reached in the dark, seized Caley's hand, gave it a warm squeeze.

Caley dove. Nothing.

"Listen folks," whispered Caroline. "I'm glad it's dark. I'm going to try."

"And me, I'm going to, too," said Eenie.

"Not," replied Martin. "You girls hain't going to try. It's taboo. Get that?"

Martin plunked himself into the water. Nothing. Caley tried again. Nothing.

"It's just too dark," said Martin. "The water is black as ink down in there. If I could see, in one dive I'd get that pipe."

They held a hurried, whispered consultation.

"Early morning," said Martin, "just at daybreak we'll try. After the *meke,* the village won't be stirring early. Just at daybreak."

Agreed. At daybreak.

"I'm going to try just once more," said Martin, "just once."

In he dove, to reappear within a few seconds.

"I—I got something," he spluttered as he climbed up the face of the rock, "but it hain't it. No."

Martin held up a large bivalve shell, gave it a shake. Something rattled within. The shell parts had been tied together with strands of some fiber tied in a hard knot.

Hiding the beating sticks in the pandang, they hurried back to the beach where Lei Lancaster sat before a little fire of driftwood hugging her knees.

Martin opened the shell into the outspread palms of Caroline and Eenie poured a pint of shimmering pearls.

Pearls—wonderful, shimmering pearls. They poured them from palm to palm, turned them this way and that to catch the glint from the flicker of the camp-fire. A pint of pearls, a fortune.

Caroline Williams gathered the hoard, placed them back in the ostrem shell, tied the fiber string in place.

"Do you know," said Caroline, "we may be able to make terms with the old queen now—those pearls. Let's hide them, a new place."

Agreed. They would hide the pearls. Also at daybreak make a second try in the lagoon for the taboo image.

Martin was delegated to hide the ostrem shell. Climbing up the slope to the lagoon, he followed along the border for a distance, and in a mass of broken rock he hid the treasure, covering it well with bits of stone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RED HIBISCUS.

FEAR, dread, uncertainty, rather than the racket of the *meke,* served to keep the little number of white folks awake. Long before daybreak, Caley and Martin had crept from their huts on to the lagoon.

Still too dark.

The first yellow streak of dawn found them in the trail, making toward the lagoon. The village slept. It seemed as if the hour were most propitious, for surely no native would be abroad.

Emerging from the trail, Martin came to a sudden stop, thrust Caley back into the shelter of the pandang.

Some one *was* walking along the edge of the lagoon.

Martin crept forward upon hands and

knees, lifted his head cautiously. He could see no one, but he could hear the rattle of loose rock as some one made their way along the border of the lagoon.

The wait was maddening.

"Let's go anyway," counseled Caley, "and knock 'em in the head if they interfere."

Martin shook his head. That wouldn't do. They would have the whole village down upon them, defeat the end for which they strove.

"But we'll lose if we do wait," argued Caley. "We've got to have that taboo, according to all the dope on the situation."

"All right," Martin finally agreed.

Boldly they walked forward. Princess Nui was sauntering along the edge of the lagoon. Behind her walked a native girl.

Turning at the sound of footsteps, Nui gave each of the white men what, no doubt, she intended to be a very languishing and intriguing smirk.

But she spoke a word in the native tongue to the maid who hurried back toward the village.

In the clear morning air sound traveled far. Martin and Caley could hear excited voices issuing from the jungles. The whole village was awake. Nui conferred upon the white men a smile in which was more malevolence than warmth.

Martin and Caley, with well dissimulated carelessness, walked to the beach. In a few minutes they returned to the lagoon. Half a dozen islanders were prowling about, pretending to be looking for land crabs.

"The jig's up," said Martin.

"Looks like," Caley agreed laconically.

"Well, Mr. Caley, we got to do something."

"Looks like."

Back to the village went Caley and Martin, summoned the girls for conference. Lei, too weak, too ill, too frightened, or something, chose to remain in the hut.

On the beach Caroline, Eenie, Caley, and Martin foregathered.

It could do no harm; the plan that Martin had proposed was worth trying.

Again to the village they went, sought an audience with Queen Mahae to whom they wished to make a proposal.

But Queen Mahae demanded that some certain ceremony attach to any audience that she granted.

For fully an hour Martin, Caley, Caroline Williams, and Eenie McGiffert waited outside the royal hut.

Then, attended by the pretty fan girl, Ataloa, Mahae waddled from the hut, seated herself upon a mat, demanded the presence of her counselors.

Suggesting a possible cause for some of the delay, Nui sauntered from the big grass thatch house, took her place alongside her mother.

Caley advanced to the space before the queen, stated the proposition. No doubt, said Caley, the recovery of the taboo was of the first importance to Queen Mahae and her people. But there was a second consideration, possibly of equal importance, the recovery of the vast fortune, the tribal pearls. If Queen Mahae would reconsider, grant the white people the right to leave the island unharmed, why the white folks would undertake, would guarantee, in fact, to return to Mahae the tribal pearls intact, and that within the time limit set by Mahae, namely, sundown.

Nui began to laugh wickedly. Even the thick lips of Queen Mahae bore a smile.

Nui arose, entered the royal hut, reappeared, the giant ostrem shell in her hands.

Nui, with her father's cunning, the white blood part of her unafraid of taboo and devil-devil spell, had ventured to spy upon the white men. Nui had seen them dive, had seen one hide the pearl treasure in the rocks.

At sight of the pearls a great clamor had gone up among the natives. This one pressed forward, another, another, pointed to the pearls that lay upon a mat shimmering in the strong sunlight. One claimed two pearls, another one, still another three.

Even Ataloa pressed to the fore. That thimble-sized pearl, that was hers, for it had been her father's, boldest, most skilful diver ever known on Uri Upo Island.

Truly enough. Queen Mahae granted it.

To Ataloa she handed the great pearl, distributed certain others, title to which was unquestioned.

Mahae turned to her daughter Nui, who

at once began to squirm and simper. Then Mahae lifted her hand for silence.

The taboo gods had elected that swift change come upon Uri Upo. That change had come to pass, and justice had been done. Even in the night time old Thrakambo had dreamed new dreams. The same taboo god that had visited the brain of Trakambo had visited the brain of Nui, bidding her go forth and spy upon the cunning white men who were defying the taboo of the sacred lake.

And Trakambo's dream had been that Princess Nui should have for husband and prince a white man, and none other.

The taboo had told Thrakambo that Nui —Nui alone might, unharmed, recover the taboo from the lagoon, the Princess Nui, and no other. Princess Nui would recover the taboo, would then choose what white man was to be her consort. All the other whites might then depart in peace, with food, drink for the journey. That was the dream that old Thrakambo had dreamed.

That was the will of the taboo. To that the white folks would agree, or at sunset they would be sent adrift, in open canoes, without food, without water.

Martin lifted his head to find Eenie McGiffert, white-faced, staring at him with wide eyes. Caroline Williams held her gaze fastened upon Cushman Caley.

Ataloa, from her place behind the queen, stood rolling the great pearl between her thumb and forefinger. Ataloa was watching the Princess Nui.

Nui, hanging her head coquettishly, stole a glance at Cushman Caley. At him she looked for a moment. Then she turned her regard to Meenie Martin. For thrice the space of time that she had looked at Caley she stared at Meenie Martin.

Queen Mahae clapped her hands together. The white folks knew the royal dictum. It was said. Nui would recover the taboo. No white foot must tread the shore of the sacred lagoon.

Nui arose. To demonstrate that the taboo god had not lied, Nui would take two of the waiting maids, would repair to the lagoon, return with the sacred taboo. That would appease the gods. If Nui did not return with the taboo, why then, Nui all her days would be a thing of loathing to her people. If Nui did not recover the taboo, why then, the white folks, all—all, should be set adrift at the mercy of wind and sea.

Nui looked about, spoke Ataloa's name as one of the two maids who should accompany her to the lagoon.

But Ataloa was gone—gone, suggested Mahae, to put away the wonderful pearl that had been her father's.

Hidden in the brush, Ataloa watched Nui dive into the lagoon, dive and repeatedly dive while two native girls on either side whipped the water frantically. Ataloa's black eyes glittered, her bosom heaved.

And again Nui dove. Again.

Mahae sent a courier to the lagoon. Nui still was diving, would surely find the taboo.

But the taboo was not to be found. Her lips snarling like those of a wild animal, Nui finally crept away into the brush to hide herself. Almost Nui wished that a shark devil had got her.

A vast throng of islanders gathered upon the beach. Three large canoes were dragged from the brush, placed in the water. Sternly Mahae pointed for the white folks to enter.

Carrying Lei Lancaster, who was in a dead faint, Martin and Caley were the first to step into a canoe. Eenie and Caroline Williams followed. Fremming and his crew were distributed among the two remaining canoes.

As the yellow sun blinked suddenly from sight in the ocean, the three canoes were thrust off, directed through the opening in the reef, cast adrift.

From the westward blew a gentle gale, a gale that would hold steadily for days, weeks, driving on and on into the vastness of the open ocean those three canoes, without paddles, sails, food or water, laden with their human freight.

From far behind the derelicts could hear the boom of the great war drum.

Up came the sun, an angry red eye that regarded the world malevolently. Proof of the steadiness of wind and current, not fifty fathoms of space separated the three canoes.

Brave greetings the derelicts called to one another.

Then the high, clear voice of Caroline Williams rang out.

"A ship! A ship!"

And there a ship was, two or three miles astern.

What a cry went up. But no answering hail came from the ship that drew nearer as the derelicts leaned over the sides of the canoes, paddled in a desperate effort with their hands.

Still they paddled, called, paddled. The ship came nearer. It was drifting. No human soul showed upon its decks. It was the Giaour!

Finally the three canoes gained the Giaour's side. Even the side ladder was still in place.

Up the ladder, screaming with hysteric joy, swarmed the little company.

Not a soul on board. Just within the hawse-pipe showed the jagged end of the anchor hawser that had been severed with a knife.

The current of wind and water carried any floating thing at the rate of three miles an hour. Within an hour after the savages had sent the derelicts adrift in the canoes, some one had severed the Giaour's hawser, had sent it with its succoring aid on after them.

Then Eenie thought suddenly of Billethead Thompson, of Poopoo, and Uri Upo, the dog-faced man, drifting, drifting on before them.

It might not be too late.

The flame and smoke began to roar from the Giaour's funnels. Three miles an hour drifted the current. Twenty-three miles an hour tore on the Giaour, splitting the swells as with a knife, piling up astern great swirls of foaming water.

Finally, hard ahead, the sailor in the crow's nest made out a drifting canoe.

Then the crowd on deck made out a standing figure, waving, calling.

The Giaour slowed down, came alongside.

Alone in the canoe was a man with boiled peas eyes and a prodigious nose.

"We hain't two mile off Uri Upo," explained Billethead, before this Poopoo he says it's too bad white man can't swim good, rubs his nose against ours, dove over the side.

"Make it!" exclaimed Billethead. "Sure he made it. Them islanders, all of 'em—men, women, kids—they're all good for a ten-mile swim. Make it!

"Uri Upo!"

Billethead paused to caress the great nose.

"I'm terrible sorry—Uri Upo. I and him laid out many a crooked course. Terrible sorry. After Poopoo he goes, Uri Upo he gets down in the mouth. I'm taking a bit of a nap. I wakes up. Uri is gone."

A fourth outrigger canoe was hoisted to the Giaour's decks. Caroline Williams, standing beside the last to be lifted, called to Caley, Eenie, and Martin to come.

Billethead Thompson had torn out a thwart, had fashioned it into a rude paddle. Billethead Thompson had made a fight for his life. Billethead had ripped up his shirt, had fashioned it into a tiny square sail, fastening the edges with splinters whittled from the thwart.

The Giaour came about. Lei Lancaster had chanced to overhear a certain intimate conversation that had been carried on between Caroline Williams and Cush Caley. Lei demanded at once that the Giaour put back for Papiete, where she could get a regular mail steamer for New York.

Everybody appeared to be willing, so back toward Papiete went the Giaour, skirting the islands that lay a few miles to the south of Uri Upo.

It didn't require much argument or time to settle the affairs of the McGiffert Steam Valve Company, Inc. The valve belonged to Eenie and Meenie, Cush Caley said so. What capital was required to exploit it—

"But wait, Cush," exclaimed Caroline. "What's the hurry about getting to New York? It's about as near to Alaska now as to New York."

"Oh, I fall, I fall," said Mr. Caley.

In the early morning, just after the Giaour had passed one of the islands to the south of Uri Upo, Captain Fremming had occasion to severely reprimand the stoke crew. A side hatch had been discovered open. What business did a side hatch have being open?

Everybody in the crew swore that they had opened no hatch.

Anyway, the hatch *was* open. Let it never happen again.

Meenie Martin awakened with a vague impression that some one had entered his cabin, had called to him. A dream, he had had a dream. Ataloa, in a dream, had come to him, had laid her soft, warm little hand upon his, had kissed him. A dream. What would Eenie think about such a dream? He was going to marry Eenie McGiffert.

Meenie yawned widely and turned upon his pillow.

Upon the seat of the folding cabin-chair beside him lay a sprig of withered red hibiscus, a wonderful shimmering pearl as large as the end of his thumb, and a piece of galvanized iron pipe, sealed at both ends with caps.

(The end.)

The Real Adventure

by William Merriam Rouse

HAROLD LANSING sat in his comfortable suite and gazed sadly at his useless check-book. Very nearly hopeless longing was in his pale-blue eyes and the stamp of unfulfilled desire upon his not-unpleasant face as he stared from the depths of a cushioned chair; at that which could command all things save the one he most wanted. Harold Lansing was twenty-six years old and he had never had an adventure in his life.

Three months before he had been a fairly well satisfied twenty-dollar-a-week bill clerk with a keen zest for historical novels and sweet chocolate. By day he toiled and by night he swash-buckled through past centuries in his hall bedroom.

Sometimes, before turning out the gas, he would stand in front of the mottled mirror and feel of his elusive muscle. War had failed to claim Harold, not because of disinclination on his part, but because it had seemed to the draft board that it would cost more than any soldier was worth to feed him up to standard.

Thus he remained a wholly vicarious adventurer until, on a certain bewildering day, a man came who prefixed Lansing's name respectfully with "mister" and brought news of a great-aunt who had been called to her forebears after long extension of time. Harold found himself with approximately a hundred dollars a week on his hands and the gates of the world wide open. He plunged into an orgy of historical novels, from which he emerged with a soul-moving desire actually to cross rapiers for the love of a beleaguered damsel.

Easier wished than accomplished. Harold wooed Adventure, but the jade would not. She flipped her robes in his face. He took a suite in the Hotel Hudson, Washington Square, where, as all the world knows, painters and writers live after they have begun to sell things. But to Harold the *quartier* in which he dwelt remained nothing more than the rumor of an empty name. The head waitress put him at a table with a broker's clerk, who had no vital interests save bonds and musical comedy.

Harold did not smoke, because tobacco made him sick, but many evenings he risked consequences and sat in the smoking-room, only to find that men yawned after holding

brief converse with him. He walked the streets, instinctively avoiding the adventure that may be bought, and found no jeweled hands beckoning from limousines—no tall, dark men who hissed the secrets of European diplomacy in his ears. He had no recourse but to buy more clothes and read more novels.

Spring had intensified him to the point of misery; and on the night when he so sadly considered his check-book he would have shut his eyes and held out his gold-mounted fountain pen to any one who would have furnished him with a ready-to-climb parapet—a romance with adjustable parts.

He sighed, and rose to his full, slender height of five feet six. There was nothing to do but to get another book from the Thirteenth Street branch library; he had seen every show with a sword-thrust or a gun-shot in it. He slipped out of the silken lounging-robe which he loved to imagine was the cloak of a cavalier and put on the coat of his expensively tailored suit. With a light overcoat and a stick he set forth.

The sap-stirring air lifted his chin. For the love of an imaginary Princess Yvette, who clung to his other arm, he thrust at an unreal villain. He jabbed, and the end of his cane found a soft spot in a very real bench-warmer. It cost a dollar to close the incident. For the rest of the trip across the square Harold kept his thoughts upon New York and the twentieth century.

He cut through a corner of Greenwich Village on his way to the library. Small, decaying houses and poorly lighted streets took on a medieval look. Harold could feel the plume nodding from his jaunty hat, and again his stick became a glittering rapier. He was in old Paris, braving a jealous husband's men-at-arms for the pressure of a fair hand that reached to him through a grated window.

The dream vanished as the door of a house immediately in front of him was suddenly flung open, and a woman's voice cried out. Jarred back to reality, Harold stopped. At the top of the steps stood a wonderful creature who might have been the Princess Yvette or the Demoiselle de Beaulieu. Her golden hair gleamed and her face was chalk-white in the light of the hall lamp. Her robes—Harold could not name those graceful garments a dress—clung to her perfect outlines, undulating as she moved.

"Ze cops! *A moi!*" she cried; and then flung back into the house a stream of beautiful words which Harold knew must be French.

His heart pounded, his legs wabbled, and his hands grew clammy-cold, for he felt that at last Adventure had noticed him. He was in a blue funk. What if, within that romantic house, there was a hard-jawed hard-fisted creature who had never read an historical novel?

With a mighty effort of will Harold managed to step forward and make his hat sweep the pavement, but to save a hundred distressed demoiselles he could not have pried his tongue from the roof of his mouth. The lady's eye rested upon him. She clutched her temples as a rumble of words in heavy bass came from within.

"Help me, *monsieur!*" In an instant she had reached the sidewalk and was dragging Harold by the arm up the steps. "Ze cops are not at all! Keel him for me!"

They were in a tiny hallway. Harold swayed as a feeling of utter incompetence rose from his knees to the pit of his stomach, but the grasp of the lady's firm, white hand was not to be denied. Moreover, she was as big as he was. From a room at the left came a masculine roar in one terrible word.

"*Sacré!*"

For a heart-breaking moment lights danced before the eyes of Harold Lansing, his mouth went dry, and then—

He stood in the presence of the only man he had ever seen whom he felt absolutely sure he could thrash!

A diminutive Frenchman, not more than five feet tall, faced them. His hands were buried in his abundant hair, and deep emotion distorted his features.

"*Misérable!*" he thundered.

"Beast!" retorted the lady.

"Bah!"

The little man snapped his fingers and curled his upper lip, upon which a horizontally pointed mustache was etched.

"Have a care, mongsewer, whom you insult!" It was Harold Lansing speaking

now, with folded arms and a scowl. "I am here to protect this lady's honor!"

"Pooh! Pig of a dude!"

"Venter Saint Grease!" shouted Harold with the firm belief that he was swearing in French. He launched a swift thrust with his cane and caught the other man under the third button from the bottom of his waistcoat.

"*Oof!*" gasped *monsieur,* in universal language, as he reeled against the wall and placed both hands where the end of the cane had struck. He grew very pale. The lady clapped her hands together and laughed.

"Ah! *Très bien!*" she cried.

The Frenchman began to edge along the wall, his eyes traveling from Harold to the door and measuring the distance.

"*Madame,*" he panted. "I go! I leave you!"

"*Non! Non! Non!*" *Madame* was swept from exultation to genuine alarm. "Remain, Pierre I beg you!"

"By the sword of—of—of—" The champion faltered while the others looked at him expectantly. The sudden realization that *madame* wanted *monsieur* to stay at home, after all, drove from his mind the name of the sword which he had been about to take in vain.

"Bah!" sneered Pierre, safely from the doorway.

"You can't 'bah' me, darn you!" yelled Harold in sudden fury; and the next instant he had leaped and gripped Pierre by the hair and the necktie. "Where do you want 'im put, *madame?*"

The Frenchman squirmed, but he was held in what his captor believed to be a vise-like grip. The lady's hand went to her mouth in a pretty gesture of dismay.

"Do not muss him up, *monsieur!* Gently! For the love of Mike!"

"His life is in your hands, not mine!" And Harold tightened his grasp.

"Up ze stairs" she commanded with decision.

For the first time in his life Harold Lansing felt the primitive joy of man-handling a fellow human. He shoved the little man up the first three steps and administered a further urge with the toe of his twenty-five-dollar boot. Well out of range *monsieur* turned and glared at madame with a diabolical eye.

"You shall pay for zeese!" he rumbled. "Ten t'ousand hundred times you shall pay!"

"Begone!" Harold stamped his foot.

"*Imbécile!*" hurled the vanquished.

"Car-nail!" And Harold never knew that *monsieur* did not understand his pronunciation.

With a snort Pierre turned and disappeared in the dimness above. *Madame* had sunk into a patent rocker, her face buried in her hands. Harold felt his heart swell with desire to protect that bowed golden head, to spread his new overcoat beneath those slender patent leather pumps. She looked up. At once a million pleasant needles pricked their way along his veins.

"*Monsieur,* you have save' me!"

"While the arm of H-Harold L-Lansing—" He grew red by the feeling in his face. "I mean, you bet I'm glad I was here!"

Madame rose from her chair, and those wonderful robes draped themselves about her. Her eyes sparkled—deep and mysterious they were against the pallor of her face. Harold was uncertain whether he ought to feel complimented or embarrassed that she took in every detail of his appearance.

"Your customs of America are to be remembered—you must beat it, *monsieur!*"

"But I want to—I mean I'd like to—c-can't I see you again?"

It seemed that there was an invitation in her eyes, although her manner urged him toward the door. She smiled, and shrugged the shrug that he had read and dreamed of.

"Me, I am here always!"

Harold Lansing found himself backing out and down the steps. The door closed. He walked upon elastic pavements and through ozone that sent the blood pounding to his head, blurring streets and people. He heard a bellboy snigger as he swaggered into the Hotel Hudson—but what did he care now for such base varlets? They little knew what had happened to him! And one could not cross swords with the peasantry!

Harold stood in front of his mirror. It seemed as though his shoulders had grown broader in the last hour. He posed in a fencing position, as illustrated in the best novels. A downward cut, calculated to cleave M. Pierre from crest to gorget, sent a bottle of toilet-water crashing to the floor. Harold dropped his cane and pointed at his reflection with a terrible frown.

"Gadzooks!" he muttered. "She is mine in the sight of heaven!"

Then a thought sent all the elation out of him, as water leaves a broken jug. He sank into a chair with a feeling of utter desolation, as he remembered that he did not know her name or even the number of the house! What a boob of a knight he was!

One kind of despair followed another. There was the husband, tangible if small, to be reckoned with. He might even call the police! At the thought of a policeman Harold Lansing shivered beneath the covers of his bed.

That was a miserable night for him. At one moment he feared that *madame*, unprotected by his arm, would be murdered by her revengeful lord: the moment after he was tortured by the thought that she might fly the city and go back to her ancestral *château*—she certainly must have one—before he could locate her again.

How beautifully her golden hair varied in shade! He would have her get a divorce—women always knew how to go about those things—and take her far away from the scenes of her blighted life. She was no giggling girl! She was a woman, with a soul fit to mate with his own. He would have her, if it cost his fortune! Toward dawn Harold groaned for the last time and fell asleep.

It was close to noon when he awoke and scrambled out of bed. Half an hour later a tray of food grew cold while Harold, dressed for the street, composed a note to *madame*. When he had finished he read it over slowly, with the honest pride of achievement.

MON CHER MADAME:

For your sake I cannot come for you while he is there. Meet me on the south side of the Times Building to-night at 8 P.M. sharp, and we will take in "The Knight of the Red Rose." It's a great little show.

Yours till death,

HAROLD LANSING.

With his coat-collar turned up and his hat well pulled down Harold approached the block where she lived—for he remembered that much—and began to patrol the street cautiously. An hour passed, while his hope went down and down.

Then the door of a house opened, and she came forth. Undoubtedly it was she, but the heart of her lover, half a block away, was wrung. She was bareheaded, a long gingham apron covered the clinging garments, and in her hands a broom went deftly back and forth across the steps.

Harold pulled his collar higher, his hat lower, and walked swiftly toward her. In a case like this D'Artagnan would have risked discovery by an irate husband.

"Hist!" he whispered as he came to an abrupt halt in front of the steps. He held out the note. *Madame* backed away with the broom held defensively. Harold swept off his hat.

"It is I!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Can you meet me to-night? The billet dux tells where!"

The lady beamed and grew grave all in a moment. She took the note and hesitated.

"Meet *monsieur?*" she repeated, uncertainly.

"For a show! Read the note! Please!"

"Oh, ze *théâtre!*" she smiled. "You bet!"

Harold put on his hat with a flourish and strode off, divided between joy at her promise and fear that *monsieur*, lurking at a castle window, might have seen him. *Madame's* reputation must be stainless until she could be freed from the roaring brute and made happy in distant climes.

Back at the hotel Harold telephoned for a dozen white ties and began to assemble his costume for the evening. When, after a bite of dinner, he arrayed himself the mirrom said that there would be no more carefully groomed young man in any New York theater that evening. Even the bellboys in the office appreciated him, and one respectfully held the door open as he passed out.

A beautiful vision in a long, shimmering coat and a big, droopy hat was waiting for him at the place of meeting. He opened his mouth to speak, but it was she who found the first words.

"Ooo-o-o!" she cried. "How gr-r-rand! You look swell!"

"I ain't got anything on you," replied Harold as he gazed. "Last night you looked like a princess, but to-night—gee! You look like an angel!"

Apparently *madame* was not ill-pleased, but she did not answer as they moved through the traffic of Times Square. Her escort, guiding her, felt himself grow inches taller. His high hat became a helmet, and he was leading the Queen of Love and Beauty across the lists. Suddenly he remembered something.

"Even your name remains a mystery to me," he suggested in his best manner.

"My name? It is Céleste Lapointe."

What a fitting name for an angel was Céleste! But Lapointe! She had been married to that fellow against her will, no doubt, as was the generally known custom of France.

"Ah, those marriages dee convenience!" he sighed.

"Yes?" responded *madame* vaguely. "You do not think of marrying?"

He turned upon her a look that was meant to convey unutterable things, but just then the curtain went up and his soul was carried over the footlights into a world where daggers flashed and kingdoms were lost for the pressure of a lady's hand.

It was before the last act that Harold, finding that chocolates were as much to Céleste as the age of chivalry was to him, left his seat.

Half-way across the lobby he whirled and turned back with a trip-hammer heart action. In the outer door, twisting his absurd mustache, was Pierre; and upon his face dwelt a look of vindictiveness that augured ill for any one who might cross his path. Harold's breath was coming in staccato pants when he reached the side of Mme. Céleste.

"We're followed!" he whispered raspingly. "We must leave this place at once!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Céleste with something of alarm in her voice. "We have to make the getaway?"

But she gathered up her hat and her composure quickly, while Harold secured their coats by lavish bribery. A block away from the theater he began to recover.

"How about a swell supper?" he asked, stopping a taxi.

"*Non! Non! Non!*" she objected. "You spend the money too much! Come *chez moi, monsieur,* and I will make you one beautiful super. *Une salade! Et—peut-être*—one little glass of wine?"

"Won't *he* be there?"

"He? Pierre? *Vraiment, non!* It is Saturday night and he will go to ze *théâtre* and on ze bat. Not until Sunday will I see him!"

She spoke coolly, with the poise of the ancient nobility, but Harold shuddered to think of what this frail woman must have endured. It was, after all, his duty to go home with her and throw the drunken brute out if he came and made trouble.

As they rode down-town Céleste fell silent, evidently puzzling over some thoughts of her own. Harold could not tempt her out of the mood with any conversation at his command and at last he also leaned back and grew content to meditate. By the time they reached Greenwich Village the jolting taxi had become a coach with outriders.

This time Harold had opportunity to observe in what manner of dwelling the lady of his heart lived. Two rooms and a tiny kitchen she showed him, after she had exchanged her evening wrap for the checked apron of the morning. The rooms were as neat as housewifely care could make them.

With a pleasant trickle of comment in French, English, and slang Mme. Céleste placed a chair for Harold near the kitchen door and began the preparation for a delicate little supper that made the best dinner of the Hotel Hudson seem like lunch-counter fare. When they were seated at the dining-room table he looked into her eyes over a glass of red wine. Harold had never been familiar, as it were, with red wine.

"Do you cook like this all the time?"

"*Certainement!*" with a smile. "I cook, I sweep, I sew!"

"Zounds!" he scowled into his wine-glass. "A man who can't appreciate this ought to have his block knocked off!"

Thereupon *madame* again fell silent, and began to crumble a bit of bread. She looked up. Harold realized that she was struggling with some problem of importance.

"You have ze good job, *monsieur?*"

It was not at all what he had expected. Perhaps she was going to tell him not to spoil a brilliant future for the sake of a woman whose life had been blighted. Anyway, he was on his second glass of red wine and he was beginning to feel that he didn't care anything about even the police. He laughed.

"I've got a job that works while you sleep!"

It was his cryptic way of saying that his money drew interest while he took his repose, but the effect upon *madame* was not encouraging. A look of sorrow came into her eyes—her head drooped.

"Ah!" she exclaimed.

It was enough. Her sadness and the red wine swept him from his chair, drew him to his knees, and enclosed one of her hands within the grasp of both his own.

"Céleste!" he cried. "Fly with me! Money will blot out the curse of the terrible past! I will take you—"

"*Impossible!*" murmured Céleste, letting her head drop to the table-cloth. "I cannot marry you!"

"Listen, Céleste! I—"

"*Pardon!*" came in a sneering bass from the doorway. "Me, I will have a word with *madame!*"

Harold leaped to his feet. There stood Pierre the abominable. The face of Céleste grew crimson.

"Begone, vile wretch!" shouted Harold. "Get out or I'll beat your face in! You have made this tender, lovely woman's life a thing of scorn! Go!"

"*Non! Non! Non!*" She flung pleading hands toward her champion. "You do not understand"

Pierre grew pale, but he stood his ground.

"This man must go out of your life forever!" cried Harold.

"But I have to live! I need the money!"

"Not for that base reason shall you endure him!" Harold began to move stealthily upon the enemy. "Beat it!"

Pierre wavered an instant; then turned and fled. The front door slammed behind him. Harold wheeled to find *madame* sobbing, with her head perilously close to the salad dish.

"It's all right," he said tenderly, with an arm about her shoulders. "I'll take you out of here to some safe place and then when things are all fixed up we'll get married!"

"I cannot, Harold! I cannot marry a—what you call it—a crook!"

"Who's a crook?" he demanded. He had thought that French women were never affected by red wine.

"You have confess'!" she exclaimed through her tears. "You work while people sleep! You run from ze cops! A crook—not for mine!"

"Mong' Dew!" exclaimed Harold fervently.

"It is soon—but I love you like ze devil! *Hélas!* To do wrong is bad! I cannot marry you!"

"Listen!" urged Harold frantically. "I got money! My aunt died and left it to me! I ain't a crook! And I can prove it!"

She raised a tear-stained face, looked into his eyes, and slowly believed.

"*Alors!*" she whispered. "I am *complètement* frazzle'!".

This was relief, but Harold's soul was still shadowed. The outraged husband might take it into his head to come back with a policeman.

"We'd better get away from here," he suggested. "Mongsewer might come back with a cop."

"Pierre?" she smiled radiantly. "He can do not'ing!"

"But you got to get a divorce, you know. It takes time to—"

"Divorce?" she cried. "But America is ze *drôle* country! My Gaston is dead for ze five years—"

"Gaston? How many husbands—"

"One only, *monsieur!*"

"But, Pierre—"

"Ze insect Pierre? My husban'? Almost I t'row you down!"

"Gosh!" Harold ran shaky fingers through his hair. "But he acted like a husband, hollering around here and—"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* He is my boarder of ze star! The one who pays always his rent! But he wants ze fresh towel' every day! Who is he to ask for ze fresh towel' every day? *C'est dommage!*"

Suddenly Harold realized that there were no barriers between them. He swept her into his arms. Many minutes afterward, when she lifted her head from his shoulder, he spoke long-cherished desire.

"We will go to France, mong cheer," he said, "and buy a *château!*"

Even before she replied he felt her body grow tense and saw that a look of determination had settled upon her face.

"*Un château?*" she echoed. "*We will not!* We will buy a farm and raise ze pigs and ze chicken!"

"Oh!" said Harold faintly.

The turreted castle of his dreams grew dim—but the golden head so close to his own was real.

Moreover, it came to him, in a flash of illumination, that perhaps he was entering upon the most potent and interesting adventure of them all.

A LAY OF THE LAZY

"IT'S a sight that's worth the waking,
When the East begins to glow,
And the sun creeps upward, making
All the gray dawn shadows go,
Whilst his rays touch tower and steeple—"
I have often heard this said
By enthusiastic people,
But I'd rather stay in bed!

"There's a subtle fascination
In the ocean's wild unrest,
That surpasses expectation,
When you rock upon its breast,
Like a babe among the pillows"—
Say the folks who like to roam
Over rows of romping billows,
But I'd rather stop at home!

For I think that all alertness
Is of time a sinful waste,
When the pleasure of inertness
Every one of us may taste.
I'm not bustling or athletic,
And I've never cared to win
Aught by being energetic,
So I'd rather not begin!

La Touche Hancock.

Honor by

Part IV

Edwina Levin
Author of "The Devil's Riddle," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE POLICEMEN'S BALL.

ON the eventful evening of the grand balls to be given by two of New York's many social sets—these two sets divided actually by merely the width of a street, yet as far as the poles apart—Professor Hiram Drake stepped out of the elevator at the Vanastor Hotel, and with mincing step, made his way to the desk as he had done every evening at exactly eight o'clock to ask for his theater-ticket.

The smiling clerk passed it across the desk and was effusively thanked. The professor assured him that he had enjoyed the performances of the two previous nights immensely.

The clerks, who had come to take an interest in this courteous, quaint man smiled mysteriously at each other as he turned away. They had overstepped themselves to-night by selecting for him a ticket for a burlesque show.

"Wish I could see his face when he finds what he's in for," remarked the perpetrator of the joke.

"I don't think it will phaze him any," laughed another. "He's here for a good time. Probably won't have another in years. Jones says that he comes in around three o'clock every night, and always explains confidentially that he had a little supper with some friends after the show. Then he tries to tell Jones the plot of the play."

"Did you see that demijohn he carried up-stairs with him when he arrived?" asked he of the joke.

"He's doing the thing up right," laughed the other. "Probably gets on a quiet little jag of nights."

The object of their amused discussion meanwhile, as always, politely requested the doorman to call a cab for him. He did not, however, as always, dismiss the cab in the vicinity of Thirtieth Street and Eighth Avenue, but this time went on to the theater, where he managed to attract slight, but not undue, attention by objecting to the position of his seat. He wanted to sit farther back.

The show being sold out, the management could not make the exchange. Did he want his money back? Oh, no. Well, they would see what could be done in the way of exchanging with some one who might prefer to sit nearer the stage. They were most obliging to the quiet scholarly man, who carried a light coat over his arm, and peered curiously about the lobby.

Some one was found who was glad to make the exchange, and the professor passed inside. Sufficient attention had been called to the odd personality of the professor to provoke an exchange of smiles between the doorman and the manager, and to stamp him upon their memories in case of need. The Honorable did not expect such a contingency; but it was his habit to cover every step carefully.

In the seclusion of the darkened auditorium, the professor's undershot jaw dis-

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appeared with his gogglelike glasses; his ministerial hat was reshaped, and presently a tall young man in smart top-coat and rakish hat quietly asked the doorman for a check. He being but one of many smart young men who passed in and out of the theater, the doorman gave him the bit of pasteboard without so much as glancing up at his face.

"Would you like to see the performance?" asked the Honorable courteously of a man standing on the corner. "I'm a physician and I just received a call. Here's my check if you'd like to go in."

"Thank you very much," said the man with surprise and pleasure.

The Honorable lifted his hat in acknowledgment and hailed a taxi.

Now in case somebody in the hotel should think to inquire the management would distinctly recollect the existence of the odd professor. Also it could be ascertained that his seat had not been vacant during the performance.

In a very short while the Honorable alighted before his new residence in the West Thirties.

"You ain't in your room much," remarked the landlady as he entered.

"No, I'm in and out of town," he explained.

"Your uncle didn't come, did he?"

"Not yet. He may be here to-night."

"A suit came for you from the tailor's," she went on, "I had him take it up to your room."

"Thank you very much."

Promptly at ten o'clock the Honorable entered the armory, a conspicuous figure in full dress, where uniforms and business suits prevailed.

Mary O'Grady espied him at once. She was circling the room with a big young policeman, who clearly held his world in his arms. She gave the Honorable a smile and a nod as they passed.

"Who wus you nodding to?" asked Daniel Blake, jealous of her smiles.

"Oh, just a young man friend of mine," she retorted with a toss of her dark head.

"Must be a mighty good friend from the way you smiled at him," grumbled Dan.

"He is," returned Mary, enjoying her ability to torture her lover.

"Is he the one you saved them six dances for that you wouldn't let me have?"

"Greedy," laughed Mary. "Haven't I give you four before he got here?"

"Yes, but that ain't six."

"Well, I give you the last four, which makes eight you get."

"I don't think it looks nice for an engaged girl to be giving six dances all in a row to one man."

Dan eyed this smartly dressed stranger malevolently and kept dancing in that young man's vicinity, taking in every line of the high-bred face, the cool, nonchalant poise, and the Fifth Avenue clothes.

"Where'd you meet him?" Dan asked suspiciously.

"'Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies,'" taunted Mary gleefully.

"I will ask you questions!" persisted Dan sullenly. "I got a right. And he don't look like your sort to me. I'm a thinking he's a society swell from over to the Vanastor."

"And you'll be thinking wrong," retorted Mary, haughtily. "He's just a bookkeeper."

"A bookkeeper for what?" snapped Dan quickly.

Mary was as quick as he. "For the Pennsylvania Railroad."

"Well, I got one more dance with you. Do you want to give it to him?"

"If you don't want it, he'll be glad to get it."

"I guess you want me to say I don't want it," nagged Dan wretchedly.

"Oh, no, I'm willing to give it to you, if you want it."

"I guess I can find somebody else to dance with." Dan's anger rose.

"Very well," returned Mary airily, but with a sinking of the heart.

The quarrel came to a close as the music ceased. Dan had managed so to manipulate that Mary was on the opposite side of the room from the Honorable, who now made his way to her.

"I hope I'm not late, Miss Mary," he said, "this next dance is ours, isn't it?"

"Mr. ——" she hesitated.

"Russell" he supplied, smilingly.

"Mr. Russell, I want you to meet my friend, Mr. Blake."

The Honorable extended his hand, and Dan took it as is the custom of men who must shake hands upon an introduction whatever their feelings toward each other.

"I have this next dance with Mr. Blake." Mary pouted prettily; "but he was saying just now that he was tired and didn't care to dance. If he's sure that he'd rather not—"

"I am a little tired," said Dan coldly.

The Honorable thanked him, and the three stood chatting together for a few minutes; then Mary was whirled away from Dan, who sought the seclusion of the wide armory steps, where he lighted a pipe and tried to assure himself that he didn't care.

Dance after dance followed, in which Mary, with flushed face and sparkling eyes, spun about the huge room in the arms of this fascinating stranger who dressed like a swell and danced like an angel. Mary had never seen an angel dance; but she was sure that if one did, the act was performed in this same floating fashion, so exhilarating and so different from the clumsy steps of poor Dan.

Meanwhile the Honorable appeared oblivious to all the world beyond the dark piquant face some inches below his own. His eyes turned continually down upon her, held in their depths that tender light which had so flattered Mrs. George Cummings Prothro, and had likewise won the hearts of women with kerchiefs tied under their chins.

It was impossible that Mary or any other woman would not have been flattered by such undivided attention. Then, it really was delightful to see Dan standing over against the wall, a statue of sullenness.

It was not quite so delightful, though, when at the end of the seventh dance with the Honorable she saw Dan make a hasty exit into the corridor.

"It was wonderful of you to save so many dances for me," breathed the Honorable. "But I'm afraid that good looking policeman of yours would very much like to break the law just about now, and commit manslaughter."

"I should worry about him," said Mary with a toss of her head.

She was, however, distinctly worried now that the excitement of the dance was over, and that she could no longer see the unhappy young face against the wall.

"May I not have one more?" asked the Honorable.

"Dan has the next four; but after that maybe—" She hesitated. All the zest had gone out of her little game.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," suggested the Honorable. "I'll wait for you in the hall up beyond the first balcony."

"Aren't you going to dance?"

"Not till you're free," he said flatteringly. "At the head of the stairway, as you reach the first balcony there's a door on the right, and just inside the door is a bench. I'll be waiting for you up there. Will you come for me if you decide to let me have one more after Mr. Blake's four?"

"Why do you want to wait up there?" she asked.

"I don't care to see you dancing with him."

"Maybe I won't be," she returned. "He may be so mad—"

"Oh, yes, you will. He'll be here when the music starts. Remember, you're to come up for me just as soon as you have a dance for me."

"All right," she promised doubtfully, her eyes watching the big doors through which Dan had disappeared.

The Honorable waited until almost time for the music to start; then courteously excused himself, saying that perhaps Mr. Blake would not claim his dance if he were seen standing with her; and as long as she felt that she must dance with him—

When the music started, however, Mr. Blake did not appear. When the dance was almost over, humiliated and uneasy Mary went in search of him, but he was nowhere about.

Upon returning, to her amazement and horror, she saw him dancing with Fanny Burns, whom he knew she hated on account of her airs and flirtatious ways.

Mary fled from the ballroom. Like a frightened fawn she ran up the broad iron stairs to the first balcony and turned into

the doorway on the right leading to a long hall. Sure enough, there was the bench—but it was empty! She sat down looking anxiously along the hall, hoping to see the Honorable come out of one of the many doors on the right of it.

The thought of going back to the ballroom alone filled her with humiliation. Perhaps Dan had seen her rush out and would suspect that she had been jilted by her new friend. Or, if he had not seen her enter the balcony alone, suppose he should catch sight of her as she passed through the door again. It was conspicuous enough. All one had to do was to lift his eyes from the drill-hall to the balcony with that yawning door.

She was still wretchedly considering what to do when the music stopped, and she heard gay voices coming up the wide, circular stairs. She jumped up in panic, knowing from past experience that this hallway was used by the youthful dancers as a promenade, and that in a few minutes they would all swoop down upon her, sitting there alone—deserted by the handsome friend who had caused so many envious glances to be turned in her direction all evening. Perhaps even Dan would bring that horrid Burns girl up here.

Just across from her was a door marked "Veterans." It stood slightly ajar, some careless person having failed to lock it for the night.

And then before the first couple had reached the top step leading to the balcony Mary had slipped into that dark room, there to hide her shame.

Hot, blinding tears filled her eyes. Once more the music began and the hall was emptied; but she dared not go back to the ballroom alone, lest Dan should see her and guess what had happened.

There was but one thing to do—wait until the four dances she was to have given Dan should be over. Then, perhaps, Mr. Russell would come here as he had suggested; and Dan, seeing them enter the ballroom would imagine they had been together all this while.

This thought cheered her, and she brushed away the tears. After all, he had not said that he would sit here all that time; he had merely said he would wait here for her after the fourth dance.

CHAPTER XV.

RIVETING THE ALIBI.

THE Heliotrope Room at the Vanastor was wreathed and draped with all the glories of the New York woods in May. Vines encircled big square pillars and formed a thick arbor of green overhead. Lights, smothered in wild flowers, twinkled like stars, and soft music mingled with the swish of silken gowns. All the fashion and beauty of New York had gathered at this last dance of the season.

Three lynx-eyed detectives in evening dress strolled about, usually standing on a square elevation four or five steps above the dancing floor, or at the end of a short hallway heading from the Thirty-Third Street entrance to the lobby stairs on the left, with the Heliotrope Room on the right. About midway between the entrance and the lobby steps a square alcove led to the ladies' cloak-room, upon which a man kept constant watch.

But detectives are mathematical. They can add, subtract, and multiply a long line of criminal figures and often give a fairly correct answer; but let somebody step out of the exact science of their calculations and they are "baffled," as the papers explain it. They expect criminals to appear and act according to rule and square—as most of them do. And whenever one fails so to act, he becomes known as "a master crook."

So it was that one of these "lynx-eyed" men standing casually at the end of the roped-off hall, paid no attention when a tall man with neatly trimmed brown beard, in evening dress and top hat, came through the Thirty-Third Street door, and took up his position by the alcove that led to the ladies' cloak-room, as though waiting for some one.

The women were beginning to leave the Heliotrope Room in twos and threes, trooping into the cloak-room. Now and again some man would come into the little hall, wait a few minutes, then take charge

of a group who came out of the alcove all ready for the street. Once the bearded man, as though growing impatient, strolled onto the square elevation overlooking the Heliotrope Room and peered out of his squinty eyes at the dancers. For some minutes he stood there; then went back and again took up his position by the alcove on that side next the light-switch controlling all lights in that part of the hotel.

Several women passed. The bearded man, with eyes squinted to narrow slits, apparently seeing no one, saw every woman that entered that dressing-room. He also saw and appraised all the jewels that passed him; and, furthermore, noted every movement of the watching detective not more than ten feet from him.

A stout woman wearing a yard-long platinum chain, strung with half-carat diamonds at intervals of every fourth of an inch, passed in. Her hands were as gorgeously arrayed as was her broad bosom. A tall blond woman with a magnificent rope of pearls looped three times around her throat followed the diamond chain. She wore also a single jeweled pin in her hair, the price of which would have supported an ordinary person very comfortably for a year. Two handsome brooches; a dog-collar of pearls and diamonds came next.

The moment had arrived!

There were hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of jewels in that cloak-room. In a very short time they would begin coming out. The dance was still in full swing. There were still many thousands of dollars' worth of jewels in the Heliotrope Room, but here was enough.

The waiting man shifted his position. Leaning his right shoulder against a corner of the alcove, he folded his arms, and while the house detective looked on, a slim left hand fitted a specially made key into the safety-switch—and the lights were out!

Before the women in the dressing-room could recover their surprise, the cloak-room door had closed softly; a pocket flash illuminated the scene and a cool, courteous voice was saying:

"Ladies, don't cry out, I beg you, or I might be forced to hurt some one. I don't want to." The flash played on his right hand as it went into the pocket of his dinner-coat. Every eye fell upon the outline of what appeared to be the round muzzle of a revolver. Every woman felt sure that the hand inside that pocket was ready to pull a trigger which would silence any one of them who might be inclined to use her vocal chords.

"And it's noiseless," the speaker went on pleasantly, "so that if I *were* forced to use it, even the detective just outside this door would not hear it. Besides he's not there now. He's looking for some one to fix the fuse. Will you please come forward and drop your pretties in my hat?" He kept his flash playing on them. "Don't miss any." Again that significant movement of the right hand.

Here was a dangerous man.

The Honorable in reality never carried firearms, having determined that if in the coarse of any of his deprecations there should be bloodshed, it would be his blood. He wanted wealth; but he did not want it at the price of human life. Curiously, he held life as the one sacred and inviolable thing.

Without a sound the women began stripping off their magnificent jewels and marching up to drop them into the Honorable's hat. For, however much we may value our baubles, first comes the primitive instinct of self-preservation. Even those of us who are heart-weary and tired of life will still, in moments such as this, shrink from the possibility of death.

The yard-long diamond necklace clinked against the pearl and diamond dog collar. Rings and brooches fell along with them. Not a word was uttered; not a sound could be heard but the frightened breathing of the women and the clink of jewels as they dropped upon each other in the gentleman's hat. Three maids looked on, wide-eyed and terrified. The long cloak-racks, a dozen or more tiers, served as excellent screens, behind one of which the lady of the pearl necklace hid at the farther end of the room. The Honorable called out softly:

"Will the ladies who are hiding behind the cloaks come out? Or must I lock this door and go after them?"

Instantly the tall woman appeared, un-

winding the pearl necklace as she came. At the same moment two girls entered from the small dressing-room on the Honorable's left. His eyes fixed on the magnificent necklace, traveled up to the jeweled hairpin which was quickly dropped along with it.

Now he turned, his flash on the two girls.

Instantly every drop of blood left his heart.

One of the girls he did not see. She had dropped something into his hat, he knew not what; the other was quietly unclasping the single ornament she wore—a diamond bracelet of curious design.

It was not, however, the bracelet at which the Honorable looked; but at the improbable eyes, the massed brown hair, and the creamy skin of Mildred Prothro!

His legs grew weak, his knees trembled, and a veil dropped before his face. He could not see. A glut of noises sounded in his ears.

Something brought back his vision. The bracelet, that lovely thing which he had pretended to examine while thrilling to the touch of her warm, slender hand, had fallen into his hat.

He wanted to cry out to her, "I thought your ankle was swollen and that you couldn't come."

There was a breathless moment in that little room. Having surrendered their jewels the women now waited for his next move. It was a most astonishing one. He extracted Miss Prothro's bracelet from among the glittering baubles and held it out to her.

She looked at him for a moment; then shook her head. "No, you keep it. I think you want it more than I do."

He had no fear of her recognizing his face with its disfiguring beard and slitlike eyes, even had he not been in almost complete shadow—his light being for their faces, not his—but there was his voice!

He had purposely used his own smooth, low courteous tones. It was part of his plan—part of his joke that these women would, one and all, describe that voice so often mentioned in print—so well known to the police—would identify it, perhaps; and the police knowing it must be, would be compelled to swear that it could not have been he who had committed the neat yet spectacular robbery.

And *she* out of all the world had been sent to hear! With what exquisite touch Fate had juggled to make him the father of his own torture!

A sudden revulsion of feeling toward the wealth in his hat caused him to feel like flinging it all back at them; and making a dash for the street.

But the cool, collected mind which had carried him through so many narrow escapes told him that this would be a foolhardy thing to do. There would instantly be a terribly outcry—and he would be in the hands of a detective before he could get out of the revolving doors. Also, even should he manage to escape, he would still have wrecked himself.

There was one chance of course, that she had not coupled the voice of a bandit with a man she had received in her aunt's drawing-room. But such an outré action on the part of a criminal daring enough to pull off such a robbery, would be discussed in the papers from every angle; and she, Mildred, would hold the key. His voice, his offer to return her bracelet, his unexpected repentance would name him definitely and without doubt.

He bent his head slightly, and with a quick movement restored his hat to place with all its burden of wealth.

Thoughts, like things, happen rapidly in moments like these. And the Honorable had not been in here altogether more than three minutes.

Now he spoke again. Another in his place would have made the mistake of changing his voice. He, however, used the same low, well-bred tones; but there was added a lisp so faint that it seemed but a shadow of one, and might have been missed in one's excitement—especially if one were a little distance away and in the adjoining dressing-room.

He said, "In order to avoid any unpleasant complication, I shall ask each of you to count twenty slowly, beginning as soon as my light goes out. When you have finished your count, you may all scream, if you care to. But it might be dangerous to scream too soon. I shall stand and count

with you for a few seconds in order to make sure that everything is all right; then I shall walk out."

Instantly the room was in black darkness. And those women accustomed to give command stood like soldiers under orders and counted, not rapidly, but slowly, as they had been told to do.

The Honorable instantly and noiselessly opened the door and the next instant was swiftly mounting the stairs to the professor's room.

He had passed the lobby and reached the mezzanine floor when a perfect bedlam broke out. Scream after scream issued from the cloak-room as the frightened women let their nervous tension have expression.

The dark, neat beard was in his pocket now and a small mustache had taken its place.

"What's the matter?" cried his floor clerk excitedly, rushing from his desk.

"Woman slipped and broke her leg, I think," the Honorable replied briefly, passing on.

With a duplicate key, his own being at the desk, he entered the professor's room. The mysterious demijohn was quickly taken from its hiding-place, and through the little wicker door, into the empty bottle, went all that wealth of jewels.

When presently a smartly dressed young man strolled down the steps from the mezzanine floor nobody took any notice of him.

He paused to ask a guest what the trouble was.

"Big robbery!" cried the man excitedly. "Ladies' cloak-room. A bearded man did it. Doorman says he didn't pass out. Detectives were on the street twenty seconds after it was pulled off. No sign of him."

"May have been a make-up," suggested the Honorable.

"Oh, no, it wasn't. The detective recollects him distinctly. Peculiar eyes."

The loquacious guest turned to speak to some one else, and the Honorable walked coolly out at the Fourth Avenue entrance.

No one paid any attention to the young man who mounted the winding iron stairway to the first balcony of the armory. And the stairway being hidden from the drill-floor, Daniel Blake, constantly watching the entrance, could not see. The dance was still in full swing.

Presently Mary, peeping out of her dark room, saw the Honorable sitting calmly upon the bench where she had sat some thirty-five minutes ago. He had an air of patient waiting, and might, to all appearances, have been there indefinitely. But Mary was not in introspective mood. She was too overjoyed.

"Oh!" she cried, rushing out with a half sob. "Here you are at last!"

"Why, where did you come from?" He rose at her approach.

"Out of the Veterans' Room," she answered with a shiver. "And it was as dark as graveyards in there. Dan ditched me, and I came up here to find you, and you weren't here."

Now this was something he had not counted on.

"I had no idea you'd be free so soon," he said. "I was in the basement looking at some of the old guns."

"I thought you might be down there," she returned, "but I dassent go down for fear somebody would see me, and ask who I was looking for."

"What did you go in that dark room for?"

"To hide from Dan," she answered truthfully.

"Shall we go down and dance?" he asked. He was inwardly much perturbed over those minutes when she had found him absent from the trysting place.

"Let's do," she said eagerly.

And all at once Dan, with jealous eyes fixed upon the entrance, was attracted by a hand-waving from the first balcony; and he looked up to see Mary smiling at one of her friends on the dance-floor below. Beside her stood the handsome stranger. They came down, and the discomfited lover seeing them swing through the mazes of a fox-trot, took it for granted that they had been together all this time; so enraged was he, that he did not present himself at the close of the evening to take Mary home.

So it fell to the Honorable to perform that service. And he was very willing.

In consequence it was after four o'clock when the professor presented himself at the desk of the Vanastor for his key. And his general appearance was somewhat disreputable for a staid professor. His tongue was slightly thickened and his eyes appeared wider and more froglike. But the clerks were not inclined to listen to him this time, being otherwise occupied.

The first primitive outburst had died down, but the hotel was still buzzing with the repressed excitement becoming to so dignified a place.

The professor therefore, discouraged, turned mincingly away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GETAWAY.

LOCKING the door of his room, Professor Drake magically disappeared, flung apart in pieces. Hat, coat, glasses and *embonpoint* were fairly ripped off, and in his place a worried young man began pacing back and forth. There was none of the excitement of the adventurer in his face now; none of the exultation of the victor.

His big coup was over! His grand joke had fallen flat!

Within the black suit-case the demijohn with its hoard of wealth lay neglected. Its possessor felt no impulse to view the glittering baubles, nor to estimate the value of them; but kept pacing back and forth, back and forth.

His mind held just one question. Would *she* be the one who must hand him over to the police and end his little day? This was not the pin-point of his disturbance, however: The thing that nagged him was not would she give him up, but *had she recognized him?*

Of course there was the other matter of Mary O'Grady, alone in the Veterans' Room, and her knowledge of his absence.

He had counted upon that trick of the mind which, under suggestion, jumps to conclusions so definite that they become facts, tricking honest folk into testifying absolutely to things which they believe to be true, yet which are not true. He had told Mary where he would be.

He had expected that Mary, upon finding him on the bench, would believe that he had been there all the while she had been dancing with Dan. The suggestion had been definite. Instead, the shock of not finding him there; of her enforced hiding in the dark room, made strongest the suggestion of *absence*. Absence would doubtless appear to her on the witness stand as the dominant feature of the evening's occurrences. The fact of that absence would be sufficient start for the police on their mathematical processes.

But he could endure this. He had, in fact, a feeling that a term in Sing Sing might be good for him; it would bring him out of the madness which had taken hold of him. But the one thing which he felt he could not endure was to know that Mildred Prothro had recognized him—whether she came forward or not.

And yet, what did it matter? After all, he had no expectation of ever seeing her again.

At last, without undressing, he flung himself across the bed.

All night long he lay staring and wide-eyed, trying to assure himself that it made no earthly difference whether Mildred had recognized him or not; succeeding only in falling into deeper wretchedness as the hours dragged on.

Never-sleeping New York took to itself a few more noises to announce the coming of dawn.

Still the Honorable lay there. Having no ambition to do anything, knowing that many things lay before him, he shrank from the details of the day—those details which he had planned so carefully and with such joyous zest. Certain matters having gone astray, he should by right feel the high tension of adventure in which all his wits would be called into action.

He was not even curious to see the papers.

The jangling of the telephone aroused him from his wide-eyed wretchedness.

"This is the baggage man of the hotel," came a voice over the wire. "The clerk said you were checking out this morning. Got any baggage to go?"

"Nothing but a suit-case," answered the thin voice of the professor.

"Is it ready?"

"Be ready in ten minutes."

He opened the black suit-case, took therefrom the demijohn, and scarcely looking at the jewels, emptied them out on the bed. He wrapped each separately in paper, then put them back in their curious receptacle and stuffed in the vacuum till it was tightly filled. The weight of the demijohn was next tested; and upon finding it too light, he added two lead luck pieces, they being wrapped also. The little door was now closed and the black suit-case packed hurriedly.

He had barely finished when the baggage man came up. The professor himself carried the demijohn down.

As he returned his key, he paused for a minute's chat, letting the demijohn rest on top of the desk.

"I see you didn't unseal it," smiled the clerk, whose business it was to talk about anything except the robbery which had occurred in the hotel the previous night.

"Had plenty without it," whispered the professor confidently. "Would you mind setting it under the counter for me for a few minutes while I attend to a little business? I want to send a telegram and do one or two other things. And would you order me one of those taxicabs?"

"Certainly, professor," returned the obliging clerk, who lifted the demijohn carelessly—and set it down under the desk, out of sight.

In spite of his unhappiness, the Honorable had not been able to resist this bit of humor. And after fussing around the lobby for a few minutes, he bought a paper and sat himself down to read of the blackest thing which can happen to a hotel.

It somehow eased the hurt of him a bit to sit there in full view of the house detectives, reading all that the newspapers and the police had to say on the subject of the robber and the robbery, with the jewels themselves stored safely beneath the hotel desk.

As no man with a sense of humor can be wholly miserable, the Honorable rose presently with a comforted feeling, and the professor made his mincing way back to the desk, where he politely requested the clerk to hand him the jewels of which all New York was thinking, and for which all the New York police were searching.

His right hand, grasping the demijohn, rested upon the top of the desk; his left hand extending the paper toward the clerk, he sought to make some inquiries anent the great news therein. Not being encouraged in this, he proceeded to wrap the demijohn carefully in the newspaper, using the desk quite as a matter of course.

"Looks better than carrying it openly," he smiled.

"Why don't you take it around and get the baggage man to wrap it up for you?" suggested the clerk.

"No need to bother him. I suspect he has quite enough to do."

"Your cab's waiting." A bell-boy grabbed up the professor's suit-case, and started for the door.

The professor finished his task, shook hands cordially with the clerk who had been so nice to him, and followed the bell-boy to the street and was driven to the Pennsylvania Station.

A half-hour later, a smartly dressed young man came out of the men's waiting-room there, carrying under his arm a newspaper bundle.

And presently a satchel-snatcher seeing at the end of one of the long benches an unattached black suit-case, upon which rested a ministerial coat, quietly carried it out, to indulge upon opening it, in a string of profanity.

Thus the Honorable disposed of the black suit-case and coat without the bother of employing any one to carry it away. And so, both the professor and the suit-case had been lost in the big station; nor could they be traced.

Before leaving the place the Honorable stopped at the baggage-room, where he secured some brown paper and stout cord, and having wrapped the demijohn for express, he proceeded to address it to himself. When it came to writing the name of the town he suddenly inscribed, "Le Mourie, Louisiana."

And so it came to pass that presently the jewels were in the hands of the express company.

He wondered what part of Louisiana Mildred lived in; and how far Le Mourie would be from her home. Then he reflected that this was a thoroughly foolish question, as he had no intention of going near her, but he was merely interested to know. He had thought of Le Mourie, for no particular reason except that a young man of his acquaintance had once taken a vacation there from police inquisitiveness; and had reported it to be "a little jay town."

His mind turned back to the Southerner he had met in the subway, and his curious explanation of caste in the South. The Honorable had always thought that position and power meant added freedom—that being the greatest thing in life for him. This notion of high family connections imposing obligations was a new one to him—and one that he thought might be worth studying while in Louisiana.

The Honorable stepped out of the express office with the intention of once more going back to Ma Frank's for the purpose of investigating the mystery of Mr. Barber, his next-door neighbor. His alert mind, never neglecting a detail, told him that here was one which might be looked into at once.

He was arrested by a cry of the newsboys.

"Extra! Great jewel robbery! Police on trail of daring bandit. Work of the Master Crook!"

The Honorable paused. Was the answer to that mysterious next-door neighbor to be found in the extra edition? Or had Mildred told? Or again, had Mary O'Grady explained about the disappearance of the young man who had, doubtless, been recognized by different members of the force on the previous evening?

With more trepidation than he had ever felt in his life before the Honorable bought a paper.

"Robber a Romeo!" cried one boy. "Offers bracelet back to pretty girl."

"Gee, do you guess they'll get him?" asked one of the urchins anxiously of the Honorable as they exchanged coins and papers.

"I hope so," returned the Honorable.

"Why do you hope that?" There was indignation in the question.

"Don't you?"

"'Course not!" the youngster snapped reversing his first good opinion of his customer. He turned away yelling, "All about the big robbery!"

The Honorable's eyes followed him, a curious expression in them—and mixed up with other things was gratitude.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

PAUSING on the corner of the street, the Honorable began opening the various extra editions inspired by the most spectacular jewel robbery that had occurred in New York in years.

A detailed description was given of the distinguished gentleman with close-cut beard whom both the doorman and the house detective recollected. The detectives, believing him to be a guest, had noticed him lean against the light-switch just before the lights went out. He had not been seen since.

There could be no doubt that the crime had been carried out by one man. It had been planned with care and cleverness, and was believed to be the work of a young man, known as the Honorable, who was an adept at the art of make-up as well as an expert at finding loopholes in the law.

The very daring of the fellow who had, within ten feet of a house detective and with that detective looking on, walked into the ladies' cloak-room and coolly walked out again, taking five hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels with him; the courtesy with which he had so politely assured the ladies that he had no intention of harming them; then the way in which he had seemed to evaporate from the face of the earth, with detectives scouring the hotel and streets twenty seconds after the robbery—all this showed how clearly every detail of the crime had been planned.

The police were of the opinion that he had not gone out of the hotel, as the average criminal, less cool-minded, would have done, but had changed his disguise in the darkness and then mingled with the guests.

There followed an account of the Mas-

ter Crook's past record, the narrative of a remarkable young man with every evidence of breeding, culture and education, undertaking spectacular and daring robberies and carrying them out so successfully that the cleverest police force in the world could never find a single loose thread upon which to fasten the evidence for his conviction. He had himself come into court and matched his wits against those of the brainiest men of the New York bar, proving that he was not himself and getting off scot free. A handsome and heroic figure the reporters made him, all unconsciously.

And a new element of romance was now added. How those reporters had loved that extra bit!

The Master Crook was suspected of having fallen instantly and violently in love with a beautiful Southern girl at the ball. He had refused to accept her jewels; had politely offered them back to her. The Honorable had been recognized, the accounts added, at the armory ball.

Finally it was stated that the police were on the trail of an important clue which, for the moment, they were compelled to withhold from the public. They expected to have their man within a few hours.

Now, this might mean, as the Honorable well knew, something or nothing. The police were paid to get on the trail of important clues; the public expected it of them; and, above all things, they must appear mysteriously busy. Also, they always expected to have their man within a few hours.

But it was his business to discover exactly what this statement meant, and at once. He had meant, of course, to produce exactly this effect; but two details of his carefully laid plans had gone awry.

Handing his papers back to a newsboy to resell, the Honorable stepped into a public phone booth, and looked up the number of one Officer O'Grady. A feminine voice answered.

"May I speak to Miss Mary O'Grady?" the Honorable inquired.

"This is Mary."

"This is Mr. Russell, Miss Mary."

"Oh, how are you, Mr. Russell? I was just thinking about you." Her voice was cordial and unsuspecting.

So the important clue did not refer to any information which Mary O'Grady might have recollected to give her father this morning in case of his having heard of his daughter's flirtation.

"Were you really thinking of me?" His pleasure was unfeigned. Miss Mary, of course, misunderstood the cause of that pleasure.

"'Course I was," she coquetted. "Think I could dance with a man all evening, and then not think about him a little bit next day?"

"It's sweet of you, I'm sure. Have you heard from our friend Mr. Blake this morning?"

"Oh, him," pouted Mary. "No, not a word; but I should worry."

Her voice nevertheless did not sound as untroubled as she clearly wanted to make it.

"I hope you won't have any trouble, of course; but I hope still more that I'm going to have the pleasure of seeing you soon again, Miss Mary. Can't you come down-town and have lunch with me today?"

"Oh, I dassent," she replied in a little, scared voice. "Dan wouldn't never make up with me sure enough, if I did that, and he was to find it out."

"Would you care?"

"Y-e-s. But maybe we could go somewhere where he wouldn't be liable to pop in on us?"

"How would the Plaza do?"

"Oh," she gasped. "I'm afraid I haven't got nothing good enough to wear."

"Nonsense; a tailored suit is all right. Business women go there at noon-time in their office clothes."

"All right. I'm sure Dan wouldn't catch us at the Plaza."

There was a distinct note of pleasurable excitement in the little giggle she gave.

"One o'clock?"

"Yes, one o'clock," she answered.

The Honorable walked out of the telephone booth, satisfaction in his brown eyes.

"Well, so much for that. Now for Ma Frank's."

Upon opening the door of the Forty-Fifth Street house, he was astonished to find the lower hall full of women in kimonos, with hair pushed hastily under breakfast caps, and men in bath-robes, with bare feet thrust into carpet slippers. Everybody was talking at once. Something portentous had happened to get them all up at ten o'clock.

Before he could recover his amazement sufficiently to ask the cause of the disturbance, Ma Frank pounced upon him.

"Goodness to gracious! I'm glad you came, with a detective in the house, and him run away the minute he heard that everybody had been robbed."

"You mean the robbery at the Vanastor?" asked the Honorable, wondering why Ma and her guests should be so upset over that affair.

"Goodness me, no! What with us having more important matters to think of than rich folks losing jewelry and them got too much already, but with my own boys and girls being thieved of the last cent they got to their names, and they ain't got much at that."

"Your house robbed?"

"And with me telling him about it, and him asking me a fool question like that!" cried Ma in exasperation. "I never knowed before that he was dumb; which it must have been that same devil that took all the jewelry from the big bugs; but why he didn't get more from them and let my boys and girls alone is more'n I know."

Her voice was now lost in a bedlam of others, as each boarder tried to make himself heard, each convinced that his had been the greatest tragedy. A curious feature of the robbery came out in the fact that not a piece of jewelry had been touched; ladies' wrist watches, men's pocket watches and pins had been left on dressers unmolested. But every cent of cash, small and large, had been extracted from trouser-pockets and hand-bags.

"How much in all was taken?" asked the Honorable.

This one had lost ten dollars; that one five; another one; several had lost merely some small change; one woman had lost twenty-five, and a girl who was known as a "tightwad" had lost seventy-five dollars. The whole amount figured barely three hundred dollars—an insignificant sum compared with a five-hundred-thousand jewel robbery, but in consequence a far larger sum, for it represented the entire wealth of Ma Frank's boarders.

"I don't see why he didn't take my necklace," said Miss Vere de Vere of the chorus. "It's got a real diamond in it, and I could hock it any day for twenty-five dollars."

"My goodness to gracious, sweetie, wasn't all my rings lying out in full view on the dresser?" cried Ma. "Them being all I got left from my burlesque days, and worth five thousand dollars if they're worth a cent! Which is why I can let folks be in debt to me if I want to, and it's nobody's business; and wasn't it terrible about that detective running off the way he did? And do you suppose he is the thief instead of a detective?" Ma sat down on the second step of the stair. "What with me so fat—"

"What detective?" asked the Honorable, having in mind Mr. Barber.

"And me not having but one detective, which is that tall white-haired man, him that's always wanting to concentrate and can't stand for nobody to talk above a whisper out here in the hall."

"Where is he?"

"My, deary, but you're dumb! And haven't I been telling you all this time that the minute everybody come out in the hall to tell each other about what had happened to him, he just busted out and wouldn't listen to nobody; not even say if he'd been robbed hisself; but said he'd defy the devil to concentrate in my house, and the atmosphere is terrible for anybody with brains; what with me airing the house out full every day, how could anybody talk about my atmosphere? And who ever heard of brains needing atmosphere, anyhow, with the good Lord, who knows His business, making the skull air-tight on purpose?"

The Honorable repressed a deep desire to laugh, knowing that in doing so he would not only insult Ma, but all these serious-eyed folk who, though victims of real trag-

edy for them, were not insensible to the dramatic possibilities of their situation.

"There can be no question," rumbled the deep-voiced heavy-man, "that we were all doped. Otherwise, somebody would have waked up."

The Honorable, of course, had already come to this conclusion. The thing that puzzled him was why only money had been taken, and jewels of real value left. There was an element of mystery about the thing which intrigued him for the moment. Even the commonest sneak-thief could not have failed to realize the value of Ma Frank's rings, and would have known how easy they would be to dispose of unmounted. But after all this was not his problem.

He managed to get himself away from them, and, mounting the stairs, knocked upon the door of his right-hand neighbor. There was no time for dillydallying now—he must know the man's hand—or woman's. He had already noticed that neither of his neighbors was in the hall below.

A masculine voice bade him enter.

The slim young man who had entered the Honorable's room by the use of a pass-key sat by a window. He rose quickly.

"I thought you'd come to see me," he said in a low, hurried voice.

"Why did you think so?" asked the honorable, standing against the closed door. The bed was between them.

"Because I knew that you knew I had a pass-key."

"And you knew that I knew it was you who had rifled my trunk; that I'd caught you coming back to replace the things, believing that I was in Canada."

"But I didn't do it to rob you! I swear I didn't!" cried the young man. He was white and shaken. "I was looking for a fan."

"A fan!" The Honorable smiled skeptically.

"Yes; Ma Frank had told me that you had one—a wonderful fan that somebody had brought from Egypt and given you as a present."

"And it wasn't your intention to take it?"

"No; I merely wanted to borrow it. As God is my witness, I meant to put it back!"

"Wasn't that a rather curious thing for a man to want to borrow?"

"Not for me," rejoined the other in the hurried fashion in which he had spoken ever since the Honorable's entrance. "I'm a female impersonator, and I was getting my act ready for a tryout, and needed a fan. I didn't have the money to buy one, and the one I had was a wretched old thing; and a tryout is so important. If you'd been here I would have asked you for the loan of it; but you weren't."

"So you got yourself a pass-key."

"No; I had that pass-key, as I told you. But I did have a key made for your trunk. Oh, I see it was terrible! And if you tell them about it, they'll all believe I'm the one who took their money, and I'll be arrested! And I've just got my booking after being out of work five months."

He sank down and began to sob like a woman.

"I've no intention of telling them anything," the Honorable assured him. "On the contrary, if you want to return their money to them I'm willing to loan you enough to tide you over till your first pay-day or longer if necessary."

Barber lifted an astonished face. "You believe I took that money?"

"Didn't you?"

"May God strike me dead if I know one thing about it!"

The Honorable, looking into the pale young face of the man who was little more than a boy, knew that he was telling the truth, and that though the mystery of the women's clothes he had seen strewn about in this room was no longer a mystery, nor the matter of his rifled trunk, the problem of the curious robbery was still unsolved.

"I'm sorry the fan wasn't in the trunk," he said. "But your act got over without it?"

"Yes, it did." The boy spoke eagerly, forgetting his trouble the moment it was past. "It got over big! And with that wretched old fan, too! You know, I think that fan is a sort of mascot. I've decided to keep on using it as long as it will hold together."

He smiled at his own conceit, and the Honorable smiled with him.

Then the young man bethought himself again of the robbery, with which he had been so unpleasantly connected only a moment ago.

"That thief didn't get anything from me. I had only five cents, and he left that. Say, but it's bully of you to believe me when I know things look bad against me on account of that trunk. Many fellows would just give me up to the police."

"That isn't my job," answered the Honorable, "but I'm afraid you'd better fight shy of borrowing in the future. It's a dangerous game. I believe nine criminals out of ten, who have any decent instincts at all, began by borrowing. And anyway, it's an art which can't be used successfully as a side line. It requires all of a man's time and attention, as does any art if one hopes for more than mediocrity. I advise you to stick strictly to vaudeville."

Young Barber crossed the room and extended his hand.

"Say, but you're a great fellow! God knows I don't know why you don't go into some real business instead of dubbing around at acting."

"That's a real business if you make a success of it," smiled the Honorable. "Nothing is a real business if you fail at it."

They shook hands heartily, and the Honorable left the other to the contemplation of a long run with his new bookings—freed from the fear which had instantly fallen upon him when he had heard of the robbery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT NEXT?

IT was now half past ten o'clock. What a lot of things seemed to have crowded themselves into one morning! And there were still things to be done. An impulse, however, to speak to his sad-eyed neighbor on his left made the Honorable hesitate at her door.

Involuntarily he thought of the twenty dollars he had given her and which she had probably not yet spent. Had she been robbed, too? He must find out; for a curious something in his nature went out to her, and he wanted to know that she did not suffer for lack of money at least.

She had wanted to help him with her wisdom, gleaned from a world that had ill-used her; he wanted to help her with his wealth, gleaned from a world that had ill-used him; for the Honorable's success, like all success, had come after long, hard years of struggle and buffeting—begun at the age of seven.

But the silence within the room forbade him to knock. She was still asleep.

As he descended the steps the outside door opened and the white-haired man entered. Catching sight of the crowd still in the hall, he flung up his hands and turned to flee. But they fell upon him, grabbing his coat-tails and arms.

"Great Heaven! Why did I even take it into my head to come here?" he cried in frantic accents. "Atmosphere! Atmosphere! Why, the atmosphere of Hades would be preferable to this."

"Which if you don't quit insulting my house, I'll have you put out, and I want to know are you a detective or a thief, or what are you?"

"I'm a cartoonist!" yelled the white-haired man. "And I came to this place of abomination for the purpose of getting a boarding-house series called 'The Ways of Real Romance.'"

"My goodness to gracious! And that's how we've all been getting into the papers of late!" cried Ma Frank, making a grab for her scraggly hair, and trying to pat it into place. "And I told you all the time that that fat woman was me in the pictures, and he's got every one of us, Miss Vere de Vere and Frenchy and the snake-charmer and Mr. Barber in his sweet evenin' dresses, and even Martha. And please don't put my hair in like this."

A new and different hubbub now arose in the hall from folk who go from one emotion to another with the ease of childhood. They fell upon the distraught man, plied him with questions, insisting that he use their names instead of fictitious ones—this being good free advertising.

He promised, and managed to break away and plunge once more into the street.

With a promise that he would come back that afternoon for further news about the robbery, the Honorable soon followed him.

So the police had *not* foreseen the robbery? As usual, he had struck them unawares!

But what about Mildred Prothro? Every other point had been covered. Well, that would have to go unanswered, for the Honorable lacked the courage to call her up as he had done Mary O'Grady. By careful management of Miss O'Grady when on the stand, he believed that the police could find no flaw in the fabric he had woven.

But Mildred was a thread he could not touch. Also if she had recognized him and had given her knowledge to the police, he did not care to know of it in advance; he did not care to escape.

He would not even make a defense; if she knew, he wanted no defense. But rather conviction in which he would have time on time to think of his folly. Life was not worth living, anyhow. Especially was it not worth living for one of his ilk. He had no place in creation's plan—was merely a bit of waste—and like all waste, in the way. It came to him as almost a pity that conviction would not mean the electric chair—a very proper place for the world's débris.

If only he could see her this morning! Or hear her voice! If only he could know what she was thinking about, and how she felt toward him!

Truly there was a God in the heavens. All through his wretched boyhood he had doubted it. He did so no longer. Yet, if there *were* a God, why did He permit boys such as he to grow up out of life's rubbish pile?

Twice he hesitated in front of a drug-store, his mind on the telephone booth. Once he went so far as to step inside and take down the receiver, then put it back in place—and with a gesture of impatience hurried on.

There was nothing but to go forward with his plan to its completion.

Proceeding down Broadway, he turned into the Gotham Building and took an elevator to the ninth floor.

Mr. Eric Neilson blinked over his glasses at the pleasant man who entered his door. Neilson & Neilson, attorneys at law, were among the most successful criminal lawyers in town.

"Mr. Neilson," said the Honorable without preliminary, "I expect to be arrested in the course of an hour, and I want to engage your services for my defense. In fact, I'm on the way now to give myself up."

"What charge?" snapped the old man, his bristly gray brows coming together in what appeared instant disapproval.

"Vagrancy."

Mr. Neilson grunted. "Don't look much like a vagrant to me. Not serious anyhow. Been getting drunk?"

"No; the charge will be merely an excuse to hold me until evidence is secured for another charge."

"What other charge?"

"Robbery. Robbery of the person."

Mr. Neilson ran a hand through his bushy iron-gray hair. This was his fashion of showing surprise. The elegant young person before him might easily have been a society man guilty of a misdemeanor—kidnaping—murdering—but certainly he could not be a common thief.

"Nasty business," remarked the Honorable casually.

"Sit down," barked the old man. "You say they have no evidence for your arrest? Then why hand yourself over?"

"They are looking for me, and would undoubtedly pick me up some time to-day and send for the women who claim to have been robbed to identify me."

"Can they?"

"Possibly. According to the papers, the thief was about my size; and you know how the human mind acts upon suggestions. I've no doubt the police can manage to make the women believe that I, and no other, must be their man."

The old lawyer smiled at this answer, which neither denied nor acknowledged guilt.

"But I have an alibi," the Honorable went on, "and as soon as they make a criminal arrest I want you to get me out on a writ of habeas corpus returnable in the morning."

"That's simple."

"I object to spending a night in jail, however, to accommodate the police," the Honorable continued with an air of great weariness.

"I'm afraid that is unavoidable, unless you want to arrange bail and wait for your case to be set."

"No, I'm not willing to wait. The case must be disposed of in the morning."

"The judge can refuse you a writ of habeas corpus if you are out on bail," said Mr. Neilson testily.

"There's really no need of my spending the night in jail," objected the Honorable. "It's most uncomfortable, I've been told. Nor do I propose giving my friends, the police, unlimited time in which to build up a fabric of lies with which to secure my conviction. By proper management we can get both the writ and the bond. The point is to get the writ *before bond is arranged.*"

The old man looked at the Honorable for a moment in silence. "Who are you?" he asked presently.

"They call me the Honorable in court circles," he returned with a whimsical smile.

Mr. Neilson got up hastily, almost overturning a chair. "The man who walked out of the Vanastor last night with five hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels!"

"The man who is *believed* to have walked out of the Vanastor with five hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels," corrected the Honorable mildly.

Mr. Neilson accepted the correction with a smile that lighted his fierce old face strangely, and sat down again.

"I have understood you always acted as your own lawyer," he remarked.

"You know the old saying that 'the man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client.' Well, I felt that it was time to stop being a fool."

"In other words," grinned the old man, "you are wise enough to know when to stop."

"The last time I had a close call," the Honorable admitted.

After some further consultation and planning, the Honorable drew a hundred-dollar bill from his fold and laid it on the lawyer's desk. "A retainer," he said. "I'll go down and arrange with the Florence Bonding Co. to take care of my bail as soon as you notify them. You'd better meet me at police headquarters in, say, three-quarters of an hour."

Inspector Tomlinson, sitting at his desk with a telephone receiver in one hand and a desk phone in the other, while he gave instructions to some half-dozen policemen standing before him, looked up in surprise as the Honorable strolled in.

"Inspector," began the Honorable coolly, "I see by the papers that you are looking for me."

They wheeled suddenly and a chorus broke out:

"Faith, and can you beat the likes of him!" "Ain't he the devil's own?" "Well, what do you know about that now?"

"I told yez he'd be walking in, as cool as a cucumber in June," broke in the quiet voice of his old enemy, Officer O'Grady, who was heartbroken over not being detailed for the hunt. "I knowed he wasn't the one to pull off a job like this and then sit down and wait to be arrested."

A smile of satisfaction overspread O'Grady's face at this proof of his sagacity.

"Have you any evidence for my arrest?" quietly asked the Honorable.

"Sure and we've got evidence for your arrest all right," returned O'Grady, who, determined to have a hand in the matter, proceeded to arrest him on a complaint of vagrancy. And instantly the ladies who had been relieved of their jewels the previous night were got on the wire and requested to call at police headquarters at once, for the purpose of identifying the daring bandit.

"I believe I'm entitled to one telephone call, am I not?" inquired the Honorable, when everything had been adjusted to the chief's satisfaction.

"Aha! You're going to act like a good boy and get a lawyer this time," taunted O'Grady.

"You are entitled to one call," returned the chief.

The Honorable called his number into the phone so low that even his arch enemy did not hear—nor the name he asked for. But they all heard him say:

"Child, an important business matter has come up which will make it impossible for us to have that little luncheon to-day—but if you'll be so good as to make it to-morrow—"

"At the same place?" asked Mary O'Grady, who did not intend to be cheated out of a lunch at the Plaza.

"Yes, the Plaza—at—say, one thirty."

"All right.

"Thank you. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver in apparent obliviousness of the looks of amazement and appreciation that were being exchanged.

"You'll be having your lunch in jail tomorrow, I'm thinking," grinned O'Grady, "unless you got a mint o' money to put up for bail. It's sure I am that nobody will trust you to put it up for you."

"Maybe not," hazarded the Honorable, striking a match on his shoe sole.

Old Mr. Neilson arrived as per arrangement almost simultaneously with the ladies from Park Avenue. Several prisoners were brought out and lined up with the Honorable and the ladies were requested to pick out the one who had robbed them.

The Honorable noted whimsically that his fellow prisoners had been carefully selected. They were to a man, stout, usually short; or if tall, of bulky build.

Mr. Neilson would have objected to this obvious frame-up, but the Honorable had foreseen it and prepared him.

"Let them have their way—do anything they want to secure my arrest," he had said. "I've got to be arrested before I can be cleared, and the longer my arrest is delayed the worse for me from every angle."

So when one of the ladies picked him out, declaring positively that she recognized his figure, and the way he carried himself, as seen by the dim light shed by the "spot" he had used, no objection was made either by the Honorable or his lawyer.

Two other ladies agreed that the robber had been tall and had given the impression of a smart, slim figure. One had noticed his left hand that held his hat, and it had been white and well kept. Finally he was asked to speak, and they one and all declared that it was the same voice, except that an attractive lisp was absent.

This was considered enough. The inspector now left the room to return shortly with a warrant for robbery issued by the judge, on which bail was fixed at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Even O'Grady was staggered; and glances of triumph were exchanged by all.

Mr. Neilson, after one quick look at the Honorable, who seemed to be thinking of something else, went immediately to the judge's chambers with a petition for a writ of habeas corpus, returnable in the morning. As soon as the judge had granted the writ Mr. Neilson called up the Florence Bonding Company, who came forward with the cash for the Honorable's bond.

Then, to the utter disgust of the entire force, that young man walked out, taking his attorney over to the Vanastor for dinner.

"The judge might as well have dismissed his case entire, and not waste his time in the marnin'," declared O'Grady, whose faith in the clever young crook was unbounded—both as to his guilt and his certainty of escape. "See how slick he had it all fixed, so as he needn't even spind a night in jail. An' mark my words, he ain't maneuvered the judge out of that writ, and him with his bond all ready, for nothing. He's got a trump card up his honery sleeve, or I'm not an Irishman."

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

SOME AUTUMN TREATS

SERIALS BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS, CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER, AND MAX BRAND

ALSO NOVEL No. 2 OF "THE SHADOWERS" SERIES, BY DAVID FOX

WATCH FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS OF DATES OF PUBLICATION

Far from City Strife

by Pearl Norton Swet

AMOS HIGGINS, one of the fifteen clerks in the Guardian Life Insurance offices, noticed a sign, "Get Your Home Town Paper," on a news-stand on State Street. Amos was on his way to a hasty lunch at Ben's basement cafeteria around the corner. He really hadn't any time to read signs, but somehow this particular one aroused in him more than a passing interest. So he read it again. He paused a moment on the curb in the hot sunshine. Pushing back his hat, he meditatively scratched his bald spot. Amos was thirty-five, and not much given to rash decisions, yet in that moment he made his resolve.

"By cracky, I'll do it!" he muttered, grinning. He passed his hand over his sprouting beard and went down the cafeteria steps.

That was Friday afternoon. Friday night at five, when Amos joined the strap-hanging, paper-reading, moist-looking crowd on the Elevated, his mind was more fully resolved than ever. His annual vacation began on Monday. He'd go back to Rushville, Ohio, he would, and spend the entire two weeks of his holiday in the old home town.

As he alternately swayed against and apologized to the fat lady seated in front of him, his subconscious mind was busy with visions of Rushville's old town pump where the kid gang used to stop and splash. Amos even remembered the names of the streets. He could recall the exact location of Andy Kline's barber-shop snuggled in between the fly-specked candy-kitchen and the corner drug-store.

The crowd at Mr. O'Toole's boarding-house that night listened to Amos's eulogy on the dear dead days when he lived in Rushville, Ohio. They were a young and sophisticated crowd, but out of respect, no doubt, to Amos's bald spot, they let him rave about Rushville's charms. But at the lemon wafer-prune stage of the meal young Alexander, who conducted the Palace Pool Hall down on Eighth Street somewhere, voiced the opinion of the assembled boarders.

"Ah, come out of it, Higgins," he jeered. "I'll bet Rushville's the deadest burg this side of the grave. Why, you'll find dandelions growin' in the middle of Main Street and a line of worm-eaten hitchin'-posts in front of the general store. We all know the kind. We ain't none of us envying you that vacation you're takin'. Nay, nay!"

Amos was not convinced. "You folks have lived so long with asphalt and sky-scrapers and jazz that you just don't know how to appreciate the nice, quiet little towns."

They laughed. Amos sniffed. And on Monday morning at eleven he was watching the telegraph poles fly past as he leaned back in the red-plush chair-car that whizzed him toward Rushville.

As the train left the smoky city and began to skim past green country places, Amos opened the window and, heedless of

cinders, let the cool wind blow on his bare head.

They stopped at several tiny stations where the name of the town was spelled out in red geraniums on the square grassy plot adjoining the little red depot. Amos was charmed.

"Just a little bit of quiet in the old home town—that's all I need to set me up this vacation," he mused. "Fellows like Alexander ought not to be allowed free speech. They discourage the simple life; that's what they do."

A delay of two hours brought Amos to his destination two hours late. Amos straightened his straw hat, and laid hands on his traveling bag, and was among the first to alight from the train.

Things seemed in a terrific uproar about him—bawling taxi-drivers, shrill newsboys darting through the crowds, hurrying red-caps laden with suit-cases—all in a glare of electric light. And in the paved space before a big pressed-brick ultramodern station Amos stood and looked about him.

Then it dawned upon him. In his eagerness to reach Rushville he had got off at the wrong station. He turned to get on the train again; but it was too late.

Amos said something under his breath and glared at the swiftly receding cars. A newsboy pushed a paper under his nose. Amos frowned at it. It was the Rushville *Democrat*. He bought it.

"How far is it from here to Rushville?" he asked.

The urchin hitched one ragged suspender over his shoulder and grinned. "What's eatin' yuh, anyway, mister? You're in Rushville right now."

Amos stared a second, open-mouthed; then he went into the station. A slim red-cap sprang to his side, and, being denied Amos's bag, showed him the elevator.

The elevator took the stunned Chicago clerk to the street level. Two or three hotel taxi-drivers vied with each other in a raucous vocal contest. Amos caught the name "Butler House." It was the one thing so far that recalled the Rushville he had known fifteen years ago. Old Sid Butler used to run the place, and Amos's father had driven the Butler House bus.

A smart taxi with a driver in dull-green livery took Amos and three traveling men to the Butler House. Amos tried to place the candy-kitchen and Andy Kline's barber-shop, but as the taxi whizzed up Main Street he saw only a succession of electric signs and seven and eight story buildings. Amos would have freely questioned the old-time bus-driver, his father's successor, but somehow the liveried taxi-driver balked his inquisitiveness.

When they arrived with a flourish and a *honk* at the Butler House, Amos about decided that he might as well have stayed in Chicago for all the quiet village life he'd see in Rushville.

The Butler House lobby was mosaic-floored. Amos's room was equipped with a tiled bath, a telephone, and an electric fan. When he went down to dinner he thought of Ben's basement cafeteria as a quiet, retiring little eating-place by contrast.

The linen-draped tables had rose-shaded lights and spindle-necked vases of flowers. An ebony-hued waiter, as solemn as a black judge, took Amos's order. An orchestra, behind the conventional screen of imitation palms, played jazz selections. When the salad came, a Titian-haired young woman in an unblushing décolleté gown of orange and black smilingly strolled up and down his aisle and sang to him entreatingly to kiss her again.

After four courses and three cigarettes, Amos went out on Main Street. A bell-boy told him it was Broadway. Amos strolled eastward toward the spot where the town pump used to be. He knew it wouldn't be there now, but he wanted to see the place just the same.

What he found was an artesian well with two cherubs done in stucco shivering under a fluted marble umbrella. As Amos drank from a sanitary cup he became conscious of an emerald-green sweater and a white sport skirt under the electric light across the fountain.

Then, naturally, he noticed that a lot of blond hair, two blue eyes, and a small, trim figure went with them. Amos was lonely. Rushville was disappointing, to say the least; so he spoke.

"Nice evening," he said, with the usual originality of such ventures in chance conversation. The green-sweatered one murmured an assent and sipped at the cool water.

Amos filled a second cup for himself and remarked solemnly: "I used to live here fifteen years ago. Never saw such a change in a place."

"Yes. Rushville is a real town now. My father's shop has grown to twice the size it was when he started in business here."

"Shop?" Amos was politely curious.

"Yes; over there. I do the manicure work." The girl nodded toward a revolving electric sign across the street. It bore the name of "Kline."

Amos had found at last a link between the old Rushville and the new.

"Why, I'll bet I knew your dad when I was a kid, before I got the city fever," he began eagerly. As the girl crossed to the shop Amos boldly walked with her, explaining repeatedly that he was anxious to meet Andy Kline again.

He found him, gray-haired and prosperous-looking, in his parlor which blazed with lights and mirrors. Andy was effusive in his welcome to the homecoming son of Rushville.

He insisted on Amos going to the corner drug-store with him and Emmy—Emmy was the girl—and drinking a series of soft drinks. Amos was not loath to go. He enjoyed watching Emmy eat her chocolate sundae. She did it daintily, looking across the little table at him with eyes that particularly pleased Amos.

Amos had never given much thought to the color of girls' eyes, but he decided that night he liked blue eyes rather than brown or gray; in fact, he preferred blue eyes above all others.

It was almost ten when the trio left the ornate onyx-fountained drug-store. Amos shook hands with them, and they invited him to dinner the next night. There was no Mrs. Kline, and they didn't keep a maid, but Andy said Emmy was a first-class cook as well as a manicurist.

At about eleven the next morning Amos decided to have a manicure. It was his first concession to fastidiousness, but he went boldly into the white-and-gold shop and stated his wants.

He did not see Andy or Emmy. "Yes-sir." A polite young barber ushered Amos into a curtained booth and seated him at a little glass-topped table. "The manicurist will be here in a moment, sir."

Amos waited. The manicurist did come—a comely, light-colored mulatto girl, in neat black, with tiny white apron and cap. She set to work in a businesslike way, never suspecting her client's agitation of mind.

Amos had expected to see Emmy. He found out later from Andy that Emmy always left at eleven and went home to get her father's lunch, while the efficient Lindy Lou took her place.

In the afternoon, however, Amos went back and succeeded in taking Emmy to the drug-store for her favorite refreshment. At four she went home, and Andy returned to the lobby of the Butler House and read the Rushville *Democrat* till five thirty. But he was bored and anxious to go out to Andy's place on West Court Street.

He had lived out that way himself when he was a boy. He laid the attraction of the place to this fact, rather than to the fact that he was going out there to dine with Emmy Kline and her father.

By six thirty he was at Andy's shop. The two went out to the house on Court Street in Andy's little car. Amos pointed out the house where the Higgins family had lived in the days before the mother's death.

"There were six of us—all scattered now," Amos explained. "Maybe you remember. And dad didn't make a fortune on the Butler House bus, either."

Andy Kline's house on Court Street looked more like the old Rushville than anything Amos had seen since his return. It was a square white dwelling, set far back in an old-fashioned lawn dotted with poplar and maple trees. The front porch was big and white-pillared. Amos decided that Andy knew how to live comfortably.

In the dining-room they found a white-aproned slightly flushed Emmy putting the

last touches to a bowl of syringa on the table. The dinner was so good, Emmy so pleasingly demure and pretty, and Andy such good company, that it was midnight before Amos went back reluctantly to the Butler House.

He could not go to sleep at once. He thought about Emmy.

"There is a little girl that sticks to the old-fashioned home-making ways," he mused. "You can tell just by looking at her that she wouldn't care a rap about jazz or cabaret or such rot. She's just a nice, quiet little girl, that's what Emmy is."

Then Amos Higgins, thirty-five, bachelor, and not given to sentiment, dreamed of a white cottage somewhere in Chicago's suburbs, with Emmy sewing on the front porch in the afternoons and meeting him at the gate at six thirty with the announcement that supper was just ready.

It was such a peaceful dream that Amos naturally drifted into peaceful sleep and dreamed Emmys and white cottages and home-cooked meals. As a result, when he awoke the next morning, it was with a firmer conviction than ever that he had found in noisy little Rushville the girl of his dreams. Which only goes to show the power a pair of blue eyes can have over a bachelor—particularly after he is well fed. Men like Amos Higgins, contrary to general opinion, do not leave their fate on the laps of the gods for long. The last day of his two weeks in Rushville, Amos proposed to Emmy.

They were on Andy's front porch on Sunday afternoon. Andy was taking his usual Sunday nap up-stairs. Emmy sat in a big chair, looking very sweet and cool in a blue dress that just matched her eyes. So Amos thought.

They talked of the poplars along the walk, and of the result of yesterday's ball game, and of the reasons for women not voting. Amos didn't believe in woman suffrage. Emmy said no, she didn't either.

Then, quite suddenly, Amos asked Emmy to marry him. She opened her blue eyes a trifle wider at that, but that was her only visible sign of surprise.

"Would—would we live in Rushville?" she asked then with startling quickness.

Amos explained that he had thought of a little place out in the suburbs of Chicago. He had too good a position with the Guardian Insurance Company to leave the city.

"The suburbs—what are they like?" asked Emmy.

"Oh, trees and grass and a few flowers, and fresh air—things you don't get in Chicago," replied Amos vaguely.

Emmy frowned thoughtfully. "Trees," she repeated, "and flowers and grass. Why, that's nothing. I've had 'em all my life here in Rushville. Do you care for them particularly?"

Amos was emphatic in his preference for suburban existence, with its trees and grass and flowers.

"Well, we could marry and go to Chicago, and then we could see, couldn't we?" Emmy allowed Amos to kiss her once and hold her little hand clumsily in his own.

Then Amos told her just when he wanted to be married, which was the next day.

Emmy vowed she couldn't possibly be ready till September.

"Why not?" Amos wanted to know.

"Clothes and things," said Emmy briefly.

"Haven't you got clothes enough?" Amos asked.

"Stupid!" Emmy laughed. "I couldn't wear these common little things in Chicago, could I?"

"Why not? I—I think they are pretty," Amos protested.

But Emmy was firm. When Andy came down-stairs about five o'clock Emmy told him she was going to marry Amos the first of September.

Considering the suddenness of it all, Andy behaved fairly well. He shook hands with Amos and kissed Emmy, and it was all very much like the "God-bless-you-my-children" scene in the last reel of a moving-picture play.

That night Amos thought things over and telegraphed his firm that he would have to take another week. Amos had been with the Guardian Company for over ten years, and this was the first time he'd ever asked for an extension of his vacation; so he got it.

The next Sunday evening at six Amos

arrived in Chicago, leaving his vacation and Emmy—plus a diamond ring—in Rushville till he should return in four weeks and become a benedick.

The pavements in Chicago weren't any hotter than the pavements in Rushville, and the drug-stores in both places were showing the same rotund bathing-suit dolls in the windows.

"Rushville's a little Chicago, that's all it is," reflected Amos as he went up to Mrs. O'Toole's on the Elevated. "Why the dickens can't these little burgs stay little burgs and give us city folk a place to go for vacations?"

As Amos came in the boarders at the O'Toole establishment were just sitting down to salmon and weak tea.

"Shure, I believe in feedin' the poor byes," Mrs. O'Toole was in the habit of saying to other landladies who did not serve supper on Sunday evenings.

Amos took his accustomed place. They asked him about his three weeks "in communion with nature," as they called it. Amos hastened to lift the veil of their ignorance concerning Rushville.

"If you want to learn the latest dance-steps or see the very newest thing in neckties, you just go down to Rushville, Ohio. Why, there's no more 'back to nature' stuff in that little burg than there is on State Street." He paused, then added: "Except in one place. There's just one spot and one thing in Rushville that's of the real unvarnished simple life."

Then, under pressure, he boldly told them of Emmy and Andy and the big white house with trees around it. They nearly shook his hand off.

Mrs. O'Toole wiped the corners of her eyes and said it was just like that when she and Tim were married forty years ago. "Suddint-like it was, and him so proud, the big bye with his new uniform! He'd just been put on a beat!" She sniffed and told Katie, the waitress, to give Mr. Higgins some more tea.

It is not my intention to append an account of the Higgins-Kline wedding. You can read it for yourself in the Rushville *Democrat* of September 3—three paragraphs on the society page.

Amos had to take his bride to Mrs. O'Toole's till they could look around a bit, for Emmy wouldn't hear of Amos selecting the suburban nest without her approval. Emmy, it seemed, could be surprisingly firm when she wished.

Mrs. O'Toole and the boarders were somewhat amazed when they saw Emmy. They had had visions of a little girl in a pearl-gray bride's outfit with silk gloves, for Amos had repeatedly spoken of Emmy's clothes.

Emmy in a seventy-five-dollar tailor-made of the latest shade of blue, with a perky little hat, all line and no trimming, was stunning. Emmy knew it, and they knew it, and they began to wonder if Emmy would take kindly to Amos's plans for a suburban life.

Amos himself found out in a week or so. Emmy went with him on a Sunday afternoon to look at some cottages in a new suburb. It had been named by a popular newspaper vote, and was called "Fair Acres." There were as yet a good many acres and not many cottages.

While Amos and the real-estate agent were talking about cement walks and paving taxes and sewerage, Emmy sat on the railing of the new little porch of one of the cottages and looked at the vacant lots across the street that was going to be paved next spring. She was thinking that the new cottages here and there along the orderly unpaved streets were extremely bare-looking.

Emmy was bored by it all and wished that Amos would take her back to town. She carefully kept her white kid gloves off the dusty porch railing, and swung one satin-shod foot to and fro while she waited for him.

When they were going back to town the agent explained casually that there was one train for commuters daily at seven thirty in the morning, and that it always returned promptly at seven in the evening. Amos was infatuated with the idea of owning the suburban cottage and had mentally planted his next spring's radish-bed; so the rather strenuous hours had no effect on him.

Not so Emmy. When they arrived at Mrs. O'Toole's Emmy spoke.

"No use talking, Amos, I wouldn't live out there in the country. It's a lot worse than West Court Street. Why, I'd be sending lettuce and fresh eggs into town in a year or so. Now, you let me go out tomorrow morning, and I'll find something decent. Please!"

When Emmy said "please" Amos always capitulated. Nearly every one did. Amos did so now, and kept his regrets to himself.

And so Emmy, smartly clad in white linen and a Panama hat, confidently set out at nine next morning after a careful perusal of the "For Rent" columns in the morning papers.

At twelve she as confidently returned. Emmy seemed to have developed a certain and well-defined assertiveness since her marriage. She was as much a part of Chicago as if she had been born there. The O'Toole boarders recognized this, if Amos did not.

When Amos came home at six she told him it was all settled. The rent was paid a month in advance, and they could move in the next day. Amos ventured to inquire further.

"Why, it's in the Coronado Apartments, Amos," she said. "Two rooms and bath—that is, one room and a kitchenette. Plenty of space for us. Third floor; and the cutest little balcony porch, all to ourselves, with an iron railing around it."

Amos felt as if the iron railing was already closing about him. He thought of Andy's big veranda, and wondered that Emmy could admire the tiny balcony affair at the apartment home.

"Why, the Coronado is almost downtown, Emmy," he gasped in a last effort at remonstrance. "It's sure to be noisy."

"Well, there's a street-car right in front of the door, and lots of things going on all the time, of course," answered Emmy blandly. "But I will have something to amuse me, don't you see? We won't be bored, anyway."

"No, we won't be bored," repeated Amos inanely. He twirled his thumbs, and gave up the dream of the suburban cottage, the fresh air, and the radish-bed in the spring.

This all happened two years ago. Amos has signed the apartment lease twice since then. Nightly he goes to sleep in the mahogany folding-bed of his tiny apartment and dreams of the lost suburban joys of Fair Acres, that restful commuters' haven, far from the city's strife.

At 3 A.M. he hears the clang of the first street-car passing the apartment. At four he turns over and mutters maledictions on the head of the Danish milkman. At seven forty he pecks a kiss on Emmy's cheek, and, leaving her with her third cup of coffee and the perusal of the matinée list in the morning paper, catches the car at the corner after a headlong rush down the three flights of stairs.

The moral to this story, I might say, lest it escape you, is: "Don't go back to the old home town."

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THE SET-BACK

WHEN clocks return to normalcy—
(Please note our noted word)—
The rooster then will truthful be,
When clocks return to normalcy.
The cuckoo, ah, no more will he
Announce an hour absurd,
When clocks return to normalcy—
(Please note our noted word)!

Blanche Elizabeth Wade.

Silent Martin

Part V

by *Captain Dingle*

Author of "Gold Out of Celebes," "The Clean-Up," "No Fear," "To Make or Break," "Three Palms Cay," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT.

ON the north side of Boat Island, the most southerly of the Diego Ramirez group, is a small cove where small craft may lie, and it is the only accessible spot of a wild collection of frowning rocks. With the great Antarctic seas ever assailing them, the Ramirez offer every inducement to keep off, and but for the high elevation of the North Rock, which makes a good landfall by which a buffeted sailing ship may verify her position with reference to the Horn itself, there would be little use, as there is of ornament, in that huddle of islets.

But as if to justify existence somewhat, in Boat Island Cove there is a spring of fresh water, and sealers and whalers sometimes replenish their tanks and casks there.

It was bright daylight next morning before the Harbinger entered, for she was full big for the place and it had been easy to put her where she must leave her bones to bleach if Martin had tried to make that anchorage in the dark. Under a pallid sun, reflected vividly from steely skies and glistening ice, the small cove lay quiet in the lee of the rock.

On the ship's deck every eye was bent toward the black, ragged fangs of earth, cloaked at water-line with a rolling sweep of frozen surf, mantled up-shore with harder, more colorful ice which sent back soft, opalescent tints to the sun; and overhead the air was full of screaming mollyhawks and cape pigeons, protesting with beating wings and raucous throats the intrusion into their bleak sanctuary. And it was not upon the Harbinger alone their spite was vented, for snugly moored in the tiny bay lay the schooner; her boats were hauled up on the beach, and there were evidences in plenty, vocal evidences, that something was amiss with her people.

"When thieves fall out!" grinned Sturgis, scanning the forbidding shore. "What's up, d'ye suppose, Martin?"

"Looks as if the camp's divided against itself. Isn't that Sim Rance up on the hummock? Look! What's he up to?"

Frances was gazing wide-eyed at the moving scene before her, full of lively interest, and Sandy stood beside her, for the moment free of all duties, staring as hard as she at a picture which represented to their youthful minds all the elements of a stirring drama.

Two parties were there, one on the

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heights, the other approaching them from below, and shouts passed back and forth, full of threat, interlarded with oaths. The sunlight glittered on the steel of arms; heading the upper party the tall figure of Rance stood out clearly, his arm waving downward menacingly; in the front of the ascending party a muffled, slender figure stepped resolutely, bareheaded to the light though bitter breeze.

"Why, it's Carlotta!" cried Frances, and her face lighted. Then association of ideas brought a deep gloom to her animated face. Carlotta reminded her again of Don Felipe; the memory of that last terrible interview with the Chilean was enough to drive back all the lightheartedness that had come to her with temporary forgetfulness.

She uttered a little cry, and Martin scanned her with intense devotion in his eyes. In good time, perhaps, he would know the truth of that last interview; at present he was only concerned in the fact that his little friend suffered again in the mere recollection of it. He slipped an arm about her and drew her close.

"If thoughts are painful, Frances, go below, dear. It will hardly be wise for you to go ashore with us, anyhow. Don't stay up here looking on if it hurts."

"Oh, let me stay, please," she cried, shivering. "I should simply worry myself sick all alone down below, Martin. But what do you think is the matter over there?"

"I'm not sure yet which is which, girly, but evidently the thieves have split up, and one side is likely to be of assistance to us presently. I don't think Rance can be the one to do me a good turn."

"Oh, no! If there is any division of their interests, I'm sure Carlotta will prove your friend, Martin. I know you don't like her, but she was very good to me, and—" The girl paused, not sure whether she ought to champion the woman.

Martin smiled down at her troubled face, and remarked, "But did I say I don't like her? One may alter one's ideas, you know."

"Oh, I'm so glad," whispered Frances, peeping shyly at her friend. Then she fell silent again, drew near to Sandy, and stood beside him, watching with every faculty alert the development of the situation ashore. Things seemed to move faster over there, and Sturgis remarked with a grim laugh:

"Better hold on with our landing, hey?" and Martin responded:

"Wait, if you like, Sturgis. Perhaps our work will be done for us. But I'll have the boats in the water all ready, for Sim Rance won't play fair, even with a woman, and help may be needed ashore there."

So intent were the schooner's people upon their own affairs that the larger ship had anchored before she was noticed. Then a cry rang out from the solitary watchman on the schooner's decks. It was ignored, even if it ever reached those it was sent to; and the two parties on the slope neared each other rapidly, determination plentifully apparent on both sides.

Frequently the voice of Carlotta Montez was heard, musical still for all the shrill note in it, and for a while it was not answered; but when the opposing bands had approached within twenty yards of each other Sim Rance shouted a warning, the words inaudible on the ship, but carrying an undoubted threat which brought Carlotta's party to an awkward, feet-scraping pause.

"The pelts are just back of Rance," remarked Sturgis as they watched breathlessly. "He's after sharkin' the whole lot, I s'pose. Where d'ye think Phillip Henry and the soak Ryan can be? Don't see 'em around anywhere."

"Not here," replied Martin absently. He was intent upon the swiftly changing situation ashore, uncertain just what it meant; but when Carlotta led her party in silent retreat down the slope, leaving Rance in hilarious triumph, some hint of the truth came to him. Even to the frozen beach the woman led her men, their attitudes those of humiliated losers, until their feet actually crunched in the splintered ice, when they seemed to shake off humility and assume rather the pose of victors.

"A lot of them men was in that vessel that piled up on Agua Fresca beach, Martin," announced Sturgis, seeing men rather than motives just then. Martin was more closely concerned with the actions of Car-

lotta Montez, and he failed to see any outstanding merit in her men.

"They're quitting," he said. "And mighty perky looking lot of quitters at that. I'll take a boat, and—"

"Oh, boy!" Sturgis yelled, slapping his leg and dancing. "Quittin', hey? Like fun they are. That's what I call clever!"

The old fellow's yell was echoed from the cliff. Sim Rance uttered his own cursing roar a full minute before the duller minds of his men grasped the situation; but when they saw what he had quickly detected they started down the rocky, slippery goat-path at his heels, with no thought for neck or limb. For down at the shore the schooner's boats lay half afloat; and hauling them out under the whiplike urge of the woman's voice the men with her answered the howls on the cliff with yells of derision.

Martin's boat dropped alongside, was manned, and he took the yokelines, a few minutes before Sim Rance leaped to the beach; and directing his men to take no notice until he gave them orders he steered a little aside from the schooner's boats and anxiously watched the play. Carlotta bade her crews stand off-shore, but remained within easy speaking distance. And between her and Rance wordy war ensued.

"I am only concerned now with seeing that you don't get away with another man's property," Carlotta laughed, in reply to a torrent of ear-tingling abuse from Rance. "But I'm cold. I'll go on board. Here's the real owner of those sealskins on the spot, Rance; you can make your own bargain."

She waved a hand airily to the fuming seaman, and ordered her men to row. Martin also gave the word to his oarsmen to "give way," and steered inshore apart from the spot whereon Sim Rance stood; for his errand was not to interfere in the troubles of the schooner's people, although his heart warmed gratefully to the woman for her clever and courageous decision, but to pursue a private and intimate question which lay only between himself and Sim Rance.

That Carlotta had deliberately marooned more than half of the schooner's men in a place where they might have no doubts about their certain doom, only occurred to him as an afterthought. At present he saw Sim Rance ashore, armed, truly, and backed by a dozen men, but without means of escape, and therefore delivered into his hands for a confidential little chat about some things that happened in the unpleasant past.

"Loosen your stretchers," he told his crew, and the eight quiet, capable men kicked out the hard oak sticks against which they braced their feet in rowing. He steered easily along-shore in a zigzag, seeking for a suitable landing, until his eyes lighted upon the marooned crew again, when all his nerves tingled with hot rage.

"Give way!" he shouted. "Pull like the devil!"

Mid-body deep in the freezing sea Sim Rance stood; his hands, outstretched, were within a foot of Carlotta's boat. And she stood easily, laughing at him, laughing down at the convulsed, fury-hideous face upturned to her. He stuttered choking oaths at her. She only laughed in answer.

"You damned murderess!" he roared, and his right hand went under his jacket.

"Ah, my friend, but you'll never tell of that!" she cried back at him, mockingly, and her boat swam lazily away from him. But she had not taken her seat when Rance's hand shot up and out, a pistol cracked spitefully, and Carlotta slowly turned around, her hand at her side, and sank slowly to her knees on the bottom boards.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RANCE PAYS.

AS if that ruffianly shot were a cue, from three points came a strange revelation. It seemed prearrangement almost, a preconcerted confession from many varying types of men of the true estimate each held of Carlotta Montez. Woman of the world, of the underworld maybe, associate and mistress of the dead libertine, Don Felipe, she whose name was a thing, according to the narrow views of the goody-good, to be whispered with averted

face, yet there had been womanliness in her, abounding womanliness which had outweighed prejudice at least with the people who witnessed her fall without a cry to the cowardly bullet of Sim Rance.

From Frances on the Harbinger pealed a shriek of youthful anger; and in answer to it old Bill Sturgis tumbled into a waiting boat with the recklessness of a boy, brought down a full crew with a roar that leaped across the glassy waters of the little haven to smash into echoes against the frowning cliffs, and sent his craft flying to the scene. In Carlotta's own boat men growled like wolves, deaf to her weakly uttered orders to pull to sea, swinging the boat's head around with furious tugs at the oars until they aimed the stem fair at the mocking figure of Rance, now waiting coolly until he could put his hands upon the gunwale.

And the man stood alone. Not even his own adherents backed him after that shot was fired. For a moment Rance glanced uneasily about him, feeling the cold isolation which had suddenly surrounded him, and in that moment, from the third point, came Nemesis in the person of Silent Martin, only the glitter of a pair of steel-gray eyes in a ghostly white face holding sign of the furious upheaval in his breast.

Some of the bravado faded out of the reckless face of Sim Rance at sight of those gray eyes. Perhaps for the first time in his life the man experienced cold fear at sight of another man. He turned uncertainly away from Carlotta's boat, relinquishing his purpose of taking it by assault, and it was not because of the belligerent attitude of its crew; it was not in dread of that other boat, foaming down upon him with the white head of old Sturgis bared to the bitter cold in the stern-sheets: it was with the memory of certain things long gone by, brought vividly back by the vision of the man who had fought him before in defense of a woman's good name, who had suffered the stigma of conviction on his account, who had once saved his life, and again saved his life and that of his crew; and the thought uppermost in the dark mind of Sim Rance was:

"He did it to keep me for this!"

The thought sent a shiver through his being, far colder than the shiver induced by the water's biting chill. He had been saved twice over, for what? To be forced, before an audience, to give reparation for certain events in his unsavory life.

In his desperation, some of his habitual bravado returned to him. He swept his gaze around, uttering blazing curses upon the men who refused to back him in the crisis; he found no face in all that number which held anything but contempt for him; with a swift motion he threw up his pistol hand, and plunged to meet Martin, forcing a sneering smile, disdaining to wait until the boat was beached and his enemy landed alone.

At a word from Martin the crew held their hands. Silent Martin leaped into the sea, ignored the threat of the weapon, and went bare-handed to the encounter.

And as if it were preordained, not to be stayed, every hand ceased its work, every man watched the climax to a life's travail. In a hush in which even the screaming birds ceased their outcry, the cold, colorless voice of Silent Martin could be heard by every one nearer than the anchored vessels.

"Rance, you lied! Nellie Clayton was"—Rance fired at that menacing figure wading toward him implacable as Fate, and missed. Martin stepped nearer—"lawfully married to Ralton," went on Martin. "For that lie, and for the shot that struck down Carlotta Montez—" He concluded by leaping forward over the last five paces and substituting illustration for words. And a scream pealed from the blue lips of Sim Rance as those long, slim, nervous fingers fastened upon his throat.

He pulled frantically at his pistol-trigger. The weapon, wet already, was frozen in his hand. He had, without knowledge of it, allowed his hand to hang beside him while watching Martin's approach in fascinated terror, and the weapon had been dipped in the sea.

Further terrified at the realization of his helplessness, never once thinking to put into use the manifold cunning tricks of a life's accumulation, he only pounded blindly at that terrible face with the useless pistol; and his blows were as futile as his trigger-pulling.

Martin shifted one hand from his foe's throat and caught the pounding pistol in a grip that made the wrist-bones crack. His other hand tightened upon Rance's throat with a pressure that speedily overspread the man's red face with darkening purple and blue. And while he squeezed the life from him, he stumbled up the beach, thrusting his captive before him, until he reached the crowd of men who had elected to side with Rance. There he flung down the feebly struggling man and uttered shortly:

"There's your master, men. Now take him!"

He turned without another look and walked with bowed head to meet Sturgis. Behind him a sailor's hysterical laugh grated on the air, and a teeth-chattering voice stammered, "He's took, guv'nor!" but Martin was unaware of the voice. He plowed on, met Sturgis hurrying up the shore, saw nothing of the old fellow's serious expression, but continued on past him to the other boat, in which rough men, unaccustomed to stricken womankind, hung helplessly over the prostrate figure of Carlotta.

Stepping into the boat, Martin sank to his knees without a word, and Sturgis, close behind him, saw creep into his haggard face a look of agonized tenderness that shocked him with its sheer unexpectedness.

"Come, old chap. Let's get her on board," murmured Sturgis. "The business here can wait now."

"If she's dead, I've paid Rance too soon!" Martin said, not answering Sturgis, but as if talking to some one apart. "He called her murderess!"

"Yes, yes, I heard it," agreed Sturgis, knowing nothing of what the words might imply. "But let's get her aboard. Frances can take care of her. Maybe we can save her yet."

The possibility aroused Martin. He leaped to his feet, gazed around, and called in his own boat. Sturgis's boat was already in deep water, Martin's crew stood off at the edge of the tide waiting for orders. Rance's crew, their boat still beached, hovered over their fallen leader in dull, aimless idleness, looking from boat to boat, muttering among themselves, helpless when deprived of leadership.

"Give way!" Martin tersely ordered, and Carlotta's crew bent to their oars while he took the tiller himself and steered for the Harbinger, followed by his own boat and Sturgis's. They approached the ship, and the frightened faces of Frances and Sandy peered down at them from the poop rail. Silently, with a tender care incredible in such men, only to be explained by the grim influence of Martin, the crew hoisted Carlotta in a slung-chair and carried her to the great stateroom vacated by Martin for her. Her lovely face was waxen, the big, luminous eyes that had carried such tremendous allure, were cloaked behind lids almost transparent; the long, sweeping lashes lay without a flicker upon her cheeks. And the respiration at her breast was all but gone.

"Frances, get her undressed quickly," Martin told the frightened girl. "Call me when Sturgis and I can come in. We've got to save her—got to!"

While Sturgis pulled out the medicine-chest and arrayed all his imperfect surgical appliances, Martin stepped on deck again, in such a torment of mind that the cabin suffocated him. As he mounted the stairs he muttered fiercely to himself, over and over:

"Murderess! Don Felipe? God bless her if she killed him; it was for Frances's sake!"

For all the doubts of past days recurred to him, and the threads of circumstance seemed less involved. He remembered vividly that wild night-rider who had all but run him down; the other horseman following after; the gruesome discovery of the Chilean's body; and more vividly than all, Frances's terrified story of her repulse of the Don at the moment when Carlotta entered the room—of her snatching up the knife, and dropping it; then of the terrible look that appeared on Carlotta's face in that moment.

"There's still justice in Heaven, and there's still great good in a woman men call bad!" he uttered aloud as he reached the deck.

Standing idly about, in spite of the cold, Carlotta's men waited apart from the Harbinger's own crew, for on both sides was a restraint induced by the knowledge that they belonged to rival forces. Martin's appearance seemed to have been waited for, and as soon as he halted at the poop-steps the boat crew approached in a body, one man knuckling his cap awkwardly, obviously chosen for spokesman and not relishing the task. Martin, seeing him falter, helped him out.

"Well, my man, what d'ye want?" he asked.

"Want to join th' ship, sir," the man blurted out with a rush after a brief hesitation. And now the rest joined in, without attention to anything but getting in their request while the chance remained: "We wasn't in on Rance's game, sir!" "The lady shipped us, cap'n. Rance told us you was the pirates, sir." And another seaman, grizzled and bent with years of service that should have left him in better case, growled from the depths of his mossy chest, "We're sailors, but we're not scrappers, sir. If I gotta fight, I'd ruther fight frum a ship nor a schooner."

Martin scanned the men closely. There was certainly a vast difference between them and most of the schooner's crew. He nodded at length, and looked up to call the mate aft. And as the officer mounted the ladder, a shout from the forecastle-head brought all hands to gaze out over the little cove.

"There they go! Schooner's away, sir!"

There was no doubt of it. Never pausing to heave in the chain, the remnant of Sim Rance's crew had slipped their cable and the schooner was already moving toward the entrance, her sails going aloft as she went. And on the beach, where Martin had flung it, the body of Rance still lay, deserted even in death by the rascals who had called him master.

"All right, men," Martin told the new hands, "there's no help for it now. I'll take you home. Your first job is to go over there and give the body of your late master burial. When you come back I'll sign you on."

He turned away and met Frances, who told him in a subdued voice: "Captain Sturgis is with Carlotta now, Martin. Oh, do save her!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CARLOTTA.

TWO earnest men, with awkward tenderness, bent over Carlotta in that great cabin, their weathered faces expressing the fear that was in them. Such rough, untutored surgery as they possessed had been acquired in the brutal school of deep-water ships; and the patients they had hitherto known were of far different clay to the soft-fleshed, lovely woman who lay insensible before them. Outside the door, ranging the main saloon, Frances and Sandy kept apart in their uneasiness, their eyes ever turning upon that closed door, the hope in each the same, the fear as deep but unspoken.

Within, Sturgis glanced at Martin, and the glance was returned. Neither cared to take the initiative. Carlotta's back was bared, and the cruel, jagged wound of Rance's bullet lay exposed in all its ugliness, marring the white skin with hideous suggestion.

"Get to work, Sturgis!" Martin muttered hoarsely. "You're older than I."

The old man shook his grizzled head helplessly.

"I can't. It's like profanity to cut into flesh like that!"

"It's death not to!" retorted Martin grimly, and with a shiver picked up the case of shining instruments from the table and selected a probe. His lips moved soundlessly, and his face grew yet more haggard.

Then, taking the handle of the sharp probe as if it were some lethal weapon, he stepped resolutely to the bed, and said half aloud, "Carlotta, forgive me if I prove unequal to this!"

Then he laid his hands upon the white flesh, and shivered again, violently; but when the paroxysm passed it left him cool and sure of hand, he thrust the steel into the gaping wound without a tremor and began to seek the bullet.

As the probe bit deep, Carlotta quivered, and a low moan escaped her hidden lips. Her face was turned to the pillows, and her radiant hair overspread the linen like some Celestial wave of glory. Martin set his teeth at that moan, and prosecuted his search, while Sturgis hovered over in tense anguish as deep as if the probe were in his own flesh. Martin began to look worried when the instrument sank to its length without encountering the lead; but a light came into his eyes immediately, his free hand passed under Carlotta's side, his fingers sought with surety, and presently he smiled wanly.

" Help me turn her over," he said with a little confidence in his ability to extract Rance's messenger of death.

Together they laid the woman on her left side, and there, on the right side, between two ribs, almost bursting through the skin, was the protuberance which they sought. A swift, sure incision uncovered the bullet, and it dropped to the floor. Then with antiseptics and dressings Sturgis completed the work, for Martin had gone suddenly faint. He was recalled to the present with a mild shock which speedily changed into a warm glow of happiness, for a soft, sweet, weak voice came from the pillows.

" Thank you, Martin." That was all in speech, but a white, slender hand sought his own, and the fluttering fingers seemed to tell him that this brave soul had been conscious throughout his effort, yet had refrained from uttering a word which might have disturbed him. Impulsively he raised the hand to his lips, then in a sudden accession of embarrassment he left the cabin, simply muttering on his way, " I'll send in Frances."

Frances went in eagerly, and her glad cry of greeting could be heard through the fanlight. Sandy came forward as if to speak, but he read his answer before the question was spoken in Martin's glowing face; and without more ado the lad leaped up the companionway and burst among the mates, uttering a whoop of joy that sent the wheeling birds shoreward in panic.

Then Sturgis came out and joined Martin at the shoreward rail. His ruddy old visage was alight with the consciousness of having helped at least in one action which softened the bleak and brutal scenes they had been looking upon.

" The sooner we get out of here the better now," he said. " Carlotta needs better attention than we can give her." He peered into Martin's face a moment, and suggested feelingly, " She ain't such a bad lot as we thought, hey? What's yer notion?"

Martin remained silent. But in his face and eyes was something which told Sturgis more than any words could do; and the old fellow's lips parted, his eyes opened wide, and he walked away, slapping his thigh, and whistling softly. To gain relief for his surcharged feeling, he roared for his boat's crew, and when the boat was at the gangway called to Martin:

" I'll get busy shipping them pelts, cap'n. Can ye spare another boat or two? Three boat's 'd finish the job by dark."

With a crew augmented by the crew of Carlotta's boat, the Harbinger closed her hatches that night on the last of the sealskins that had wrought so much evil. Bobbing on the light swell inshore was the single boat left behind by the schooner, kicked adrift in panic by the last man to spring into the vessel's chains.

On the slope of the cliff, his tomb marked by a heap of rocks, Sim Rance remained in perpetual guardianship of the empty treasury he had helped to loot. And in the first falling of the short twilight the Harbinger worked out of the cove in a faint breeze, to be heeled down to the waterways in a cascade of foaming seas the moment she cleared the lee of the shore. But now the harder it blew the better; for were they not homeward-bound?

Homeward-bound! It was a question now which was home to them. In the saloon at supper, with the mates on deck, the discussion inevitably turned on destinations; for Carlotta could get no care in Agua Fresca, and it was unthinkable that they carry her there in her present condition to certainly face the charge of having killed Don Felipe.

Martin's hands, too, were not free from the taint of blood; and while neither he nor Carlotta wanted to evade justice, con-

fident in the justification for their individual acts, Sturgis was of the opinion that all ends would be better served by getting Carlotta well first.

"Besides," he said, whimsically, "there's been so many o' these pelts run ashore on Chilean territory that I fancy the Argentine somehow for this lot. A better market all round, Martin, and the finest doctors south o' Capricorn in Buenos Aires. We'll try it, hey? What's Frances say?"

"I say anywhere on earth if it means recovery for Carlotta!" replied the girl impulsively, and now Martin felt only a shadow of his former pain when she left him out of the picture in favor of another. Some thoughts which were rarely absent from his mind of late, even impelled him to smile indulgently at the impulsivenesss of Frances. She detected that smile, and rising swiftly from the table ran round and flung her arms about his neck, placing her warm cheek to his.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she murmured, her eyes gleaming, and her lips like a fragrant flower-bud. "I haven't been good to Uncle Martin lately, I know; but you mustn't be jealous of Carlotta—"

"I'll try not to, little girl," smiled Martin, "but she's kind of taken my place, hasn't she?"

"Your place? My word! No one could ever take the place of Uncle Martin!" she cried. "But don't you see it's different? Carlotta is a woman, like I am"—Martin and Sturgis smiled in appreciation of her mature tone—"and besides she was good to me and she is very ill. You really mustn't be jealous of poor Carlotta!"

"Poor Carlotta! I think Carlotta is one of the most fortunate ladies in the world, to have gained such a friend, Frances." The girl blushed at his praise, but seemed to fear that she was being made fun of, rather.

Martin made haste to add, "But I wouldn't think of being jealous of her, little one. I think I should rather be jealous of Sandy."

"Now you're horrid!" she cried, and rushed away in sweet confusion to her own cabin, while at the foot of the table sat Sandy, his face a flaming red, his mouth open in amazement, and a half-awakened imp in his eyes proclaiming to all the world the fact that the lad was beginning to understand things.

"Sandy!" Martin rapped the word out sternly, and tried to smother the amusement in his voice. "Get along on deck now. You take too long over meals for a young fellow anyhow."

"Yes, sir," Sandy stammered, and obeyed; but if he did not tread on air as he mounted the stairs, at least the steps were aerated, and his recently awakened soul sang until his ears buzzed.

"Say, what's the situation exactly?" drawled Sturgis, looking Martin squarely in the eyes when the lad had gone. "I been watchin' a bit o' play actin' ever since I knowed you, Silent Martin Gray, and I thought I see things as they was, but—you wasn't so blamed chummy with Carlotta at first, though I admit you had no reason for not bein'—and the way you guarded Frances an' made yerself everlastin'ly disliked on account o' what ye done in her behalf, sort o' p'inted to her one day growin' up afore ye was old, an'—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Martin irritably. "Better get through eating and let the mates eat. There's plenty to think about in deciding where you're bound for, without bothering your head with calculations in couples."

Staten Land was in sight to port, a vague blur of desolation, when at a hail from aloft binoculars were brought to bear upon an object close under the land. Martin and Sturgis examined it long before each turned to regard the other questioningly.

"The schooner, ain't it?" suggested Sturgis.

"Yes, dismasted and abandoned. She's awash and almost gone, apparently. Better run down and look at her. May be some hands aboard her yet, don't you think?"

"Not a chance. Not a soul in sight, Martin. Look closer inshore. That looks like a raft o' sorts, don't it?"

Simply a blacker dot against the loom of Staten Land, a low-lying, laboring structure slowly approached the land, impelled by a rag of canvas set on a short pole, an oar perhaps.

"They'll make it," Martin remarked, and with a grimace added, "A bitter prospect for them there! Perhaps it's just as well, though; a lesson for them, if such men ever learn lessons."

Northward the Harbinger sped, piling up the seas ahead of her and the miles astern, and warmer skies succeeded the biting cold of the south. With a tenderness unlooked for in men, Martin and Sturgis carried Carlotta on deck to absorb the bright sunshine, and she lay on the skylight lockers among heaps of soft cushions, looking like a waxen figure out of which great luminous eyes gazed fixedly.

Only when they bent over her to offer a service did life leap into her pallid face; and when it was Martin who approached she seemed like a being born again. Her scarlet lips retained their vivid color, her eyes still held golden lights in their fathomless depths; but those eyes had lost the bold allure of former days, they revealed, rather, the awakened or resurrected passion of a good woman, strong yet tranquil, with still a touch of awe at the tremendous change.

And Frances, quieter, more subdued than of old, flitted from couch-side to rail, and from rail to companionway, wearing an air of forced detachment whenever she caught sight of a flaming red head and felt the gaze of two bright blue eyes fastened upon her as if to demand that she notice the feats of Sandy Sturgis.

Only when those blue eyes were turned elsewhere did she follow their owner; and then into her own brown eyes crept a soft, moist brilliancy, her rosy cheeks glowed with deeper red. And made bold by his growing manhood, Sandy ever found excuses to pass near her, bolder at times he stopped to whisper in her ear, and when she would rebuff him with a pout and upflung chin he would smile knowingly, sneaking a swift touch of the hand before obeying her regal command to be off about his business.

Neither these little passages nor what passed between Martin Gray and Carlotta escaped the piercing eyes of old Captain Sturgis. He felt isolated in his own ship, yet his deep chest ever rumbled with knowing, pleased chuckles, his ruddy old face wore an expression of resigned martyrdom which seemed not at all painful.

And so in good time the Harbinger made her port, with many problems yet to be solved among her people, but carrying within her splendid old hull high hopes in breasts which nursed fears yet refused to let fear overpower hope. Sturgis, wise old fox that he was, had foreseen, or actually intended at first perhaps, that an immediate return to Chilean soil would be inopportune; and his papers covered this entry into the port of Buenos Aires. Therefore, when the ship had found a snug berth, tucked away down beyond the busy grain wharves, he assumed his position as owner, dismissed Martin, and ordered him to take Carlotta and Frances to a hotel and arrange for Carlotta's cure.

"But I am cured, my good friend," smiled Carlotta, weakly. "No doctor can add to the care you have given me."

Sturgis blushed at the praise, and hid his pleasure under a forced gruffness.

"I ain't done nothin', ma'am," he growled. "Anyhow, you ain't cured as much as you think. You go with Martin, and let him judge for ye. Martin," he said sharply, unwilling to prolong a discussion which embarrassed him, "get along to town. Plenty o' good hotels—the Paris, or the Phenix is both fine and quiet this time o' year. Send me word where yer located, so I can find ye. Get along now, and leave me to do my business."

Her brief sojourn in Buenos Aires had not been without acquired friendships for Frances, and telephone messages from the hotel, as soon as Martin had established her and asked her to excuse him while he arranged for Carlotta's attendance, speedily brought results in a shoal of impatient invitations to visit her acquaintances.

"Tell one of your friends to come here for you, little one," said the careful Martin, "then you can spend the day where you like, and I'll feel absolutely sure that you're safe."

The friend who responded satisfied Martin, and Frances put on her outdoor clothes in an ecstasy of joyful anticipation. Her

pleasure was not marred, but only postponed for a very brief interval, when Carlotta, knowing her intention, asked Martin, with an air of exercising a sick woman's whim, to please be permitted to see the visitor.

"I have not yet outlived my inordinate desire for fresh faces, my friend," she smiled at him, and he brought in the friends of Frances, a dignified, stately lady bearing all the marks of an old and honorable lineage, and a sprightly, sloe-eyed, dancing sprite of a girl whom she presented as her daughter and a schoolmate of Frances.

The interview was short, and Martin glowed inwardly to see that the representative of an honorable house met Carlotta upon terms of cordial sympathy and left her with sincere wishes for future and deeper intimacy. His own gratification was not lessened after the visitors had taken Frances away, when Carlotta smiled up at him and said softly:

"It is well, my friend. And your little friend Frances is in good hands. Now let us see what can be done with this poor body of mine."

The best doctor in the city was called in, and Martin hovered about outside the room awaiting the great man's pronouncement. When it came, there was no need for Carlotta to leave the hotel, unless she preferred, which she did not, and promise was definitely made that her recovery only depended upon care and freedom from worry.

Nurses were found, who could be depended on to do as they were ordered, and in mid-afternoon, when Carlotta was comfortably resting, Martin sat in the outer room waiting for the arrival of Sturgis or the return of Frances. Frances telephoned at four o'clock that she would accept the invitation of her friends to stay overnight, and Martin began to feel the despondency of desertion. He wished he might flout the physician's orders and spend a peaceful hour with Carlotta, but he knew how unreasonable that wish was. It came as a shock, speedily changing to pleasure, when the day nurse came out and told him he was wanted in Carlotta's room. He entered without answering in his eagerness.

"Now let us talk of Don Felipe," she said softly, and his horrified eyes met hers, calm, untroubled, yet mysterious.

CHAPTER XXV.

"FOR FRANCES."

MARTIN was stricken dumb. Not only was a simple conversation bordering upon the prohibited, but here was a subject raised by the patient herself which promised to supply far more of worry and excitement than he himself could endure, much less Carlotta. He recalled that last scene in the Don's known life, as related by Frances, and as it flashed through his mind he gazed at the woman in somber distress. He had become convinced that Carlotta's was the hand that had driven that knife home, and far from blaming her for it he had felt a deep sense of gratitude to her in that she must surely have done this deed in defense of Frances. She saw the trouble in his face, and laughed gently.

"My friend," she said, "perhaps it hurts you. But have no fear for me. I shall be the better for speaking of this. If what is on my mind now must remain untold or undiscussed, there will be no sleep, no rest for me to-night."

"But I can't speak of it," he exclaimed, rising and pacing the apartment in distress. She followed him with her eyes, and a tinge of color crept into her face. "Whatever your part in that—"

He stopped, afraid to utter the word. Again she laughed, softly, musically, and he stared at her in wonder. She whispered thrillingly, "So you have decided that I am a murderess? You heard what Rance said to me in the boat, yes?"

"I heard," nodded Martin. "But I don't blame you, Carlotta. I am grateful to you."

"Come nearer, Martin. I shall tell you the truth now—" Still again her low, rippling laugh burst forth, and he faced her only to experience a sharper shock; for her great, dark eyes were fastened upon his face with an expression of veiled amusement. At such a moment amusement seemed sacrilege to him.

He was drawn inevitably to her side, and as from a great distance her voice assailed his ears with a story utterly astounding in the light of his decision already formed.

"Martin, if I tell you the truth, will it hurt you? I think not, my friend. You are strong, under that quiet exterior. And I do not ask you to answer whether I am right or wrong. On that night, when Frances was in peril, she has told you I entered the room just as she snatched up a knife, in childish desperation, to defend herself. As she turned to run away, and dropped the knife, I caught it, and I confess murder was in my heart, and the Don saw it. But before I could strike, another burst into the room, behind me, and I saw Don Felipe's face turn pale. I never saw the man who thus put the fear of death into him; for I was caught and hurled aside, falling face down upon the sofa, and in a space of five swift seconds there was a curse, a fall, and a crash through the half-open door. When I struggled to my feet, Don Felipe lay writhing on the floor with a knife in his breast, and his murderer was gone as abruptly as he had come."

Carlotta paused for breath, her breast fluttering with weakness, but her burning eyes were firmly fixed upon Martin. She continued:

"I am not given to hysterical outbursts, Martin, and I had hated Don Felipe so fiercely that I felt no repugnance in the presence of his dead body. I, too, felt grateful to the hand that had struck him down. But I began to gather my effects together, to leave the house, not from any fear of consequences to myself—that did not occur to me then—but I knew a great wrong had been done to friends of mine, and a greater was in process of hatching. I meant to stop the further theft of Captain Sturgis's sealskins.

"But while I was yet busy, Sim Rance came to the house to get final orders from Don Felipe; and when he discovered the truth he announced that he would go on with the voyage for his own benefit, now that his employer was dead. And he made no secret that he believed my hand was red. He tried to force me into going with him, and his odious love-making maddened me so that I grew cunning. I matched my wits with his, and persuaded him by suggestion that perhaps I would listen to his suit, but not just then.

"I ran out to my horse, and rode through a bitter night to his schooner, with him close behind me. Then, on the Islands, I played my game as I had planned: split up his crew, and stopped his villainy"—Carlotta paused again, and smiled wearily—"that is, almost stopped it, Martin. His bullet might yet have won had it not been that your ship arrived."

Martin had resumed his feverish pacing of the floor, and her voice presently startled him more than anything that had preceded what she said now.

"Look!" she cried. He turned, and she held out to him a knife, an ornamental dagger, used on Don Felipe's desk as a paper-knife, yet fully potent as a weapon. "Look, this is the knife Frances snatched up, and which I caught from her as she fled. Now"—her low, tense tone sent a shiver through Martin's bones—"whose was the knife that struck down the Don, Martin?"

As if shot, Martin straightened up with a jerk, then sagged down, shoulders bowed, head sunk on his breast, his face working hideously. There was no misunderstanding the implication. True, Carlotta's gaze held nothing for him outwardly except warm loyalty and comradeship; yet he felt that he was accused, and like a shaft of devilish light the memory came to him of that face he had seen at the veranda window of the ranch-house, and of the dread that had assailed him that his own position would need much explaining.

He raised his head and looked long and earnestly into her face; and now her eyes held what seemed to be a yearning, a clouded womanly longing for something hitherto unknown in her life of nomadic roving; her red lips quivered slightly, a subtle color stole into her cheeks.

And the thought which staggered Martin was:

"She's lying! She's trying now to fasten this thing on me! Such a woman can never outgrow the effects of such a life of lawless-

ness as she has led. Yet—yet she did it in defense of Frances!"

He entertained no doubt whatever that Carlotta was guilty of this crime. That alone would have made no difference in his feelings toward her; but her new attitude, the palpable lie, the bald attempt to saddle him with her fault, shattered in his breast all of the warm sentiment, very near to love, which had insidiously implanted itself there during their closer acquaintance. He turned abruptly from the couch and said harshly:

"I want to think this over alone, Carlotta." Then he left, sent in the nurse, and took himself off to the smoking-room, deserted at that hour, to wrestle with his problem and wait for Sturgis to help and advise him.

"She did it for Frances," his brain kept telling him. And he muttered continually those words, "She killed him in defense of my little friend!"

He had already forgiven her, though not in the least losing his resentment at her apparent attempt against himself, when, at seven o'clock, Sturgis blustered in, elated with a good day's work and anxious regarding Martin's day and Carlotta's progress. He had caught sight of Frances on his way to the hotel, and—

"Gashamighty, man!" he exploded. "Our little lady seems to have captured Buenos Aires by storm. Ridin' in carriages, smothered with flowers, an'—but, say, what's gnawin' at ye, Martin? Ye look like ye'd swallowed somethin' nasty."

"I have," Martin returned shortly, and a silence ensued in which honest old Sturgis squirmed on his chair. In the effort to break the awkward spell oppressing them he remarked with a keen, sidelong look at his friend:

"I heard to-day as they found Ralton's body while they was draggin' for yours. He had your cash-box gripped tight, too. You can face 'em all in Agua Fresca now if ye want to, lad."

The news failed to arouse more than a passing interest in Martin, and Sturgis stared wonderingly at him. He added another bit of gossip which he felt sure would drag the gloomy man out of himself.

"Old Nix flew the coop, too, when he recovered from yer maulin' and found that woman had delivered Ralton's papers to ye. I s'pose he seen his finish when he knew those papers would tell ye all about his association with Don F'lippy in that pelt stealin'."

"He was in more than that," retorted Martin, with a hard laugh. Something in his forced manner persuaded Sturgis that he was undergoing a mental ordeal in which quiet sympathy might help more than honest bluster; he laid a great brown hand upon his friend's knee, and said:

"Tell yer old friend what ails ye, lad. Is is them folks down th' Straits as is still botherin' ye?"

"They can't bother me now, Sturgis. They ought never to have bothered me, only that I suppose I was a fool. If I had been half a man nobody down there would have dared to look sidewise at me. What was it, anyhow? The thing Rance mouthed in that Santa Cruz barroom was simply that Frances's mother was only Ralton's mistress, not his wife. She was dead at that time; but I had loved her; we were to be married when I returned from a voyage; but before that day arrived she had gone away with Ralton. It was enough for me. If she wanted him, I wouldn't stand in her way.

"But if he hadn't married her, I meant to tear his heart out. I fought Rance when he made that drunken announcement; thought I'd killed him, as I told you. I was mistaken, fortunately, but I made that lonely boat trip down to Agua Fresca to find Ralton and make him face me. I found Rance had lied. Ralton had married her, and I believe, in his way, had loved her. But he was a pretty low-down sort of rascal, as I soon discovered when I began to take as much interest in his daughter, Frances, as if she were my own.

"He knew all the time that Rance had not been killed. So he used my fear that I had killed him, and the fact that I had escaped from jail, to blackmail me to the limit. And I stood it, gladly, for Frances found a place in my heart to the exclusion of all else, and I would have died, I think, if she had been taken away. My feelings

for her were the deeper because of her mother's fault. They were not married, you know, until just before Frances was born. I ached as I watched the child grow up; ached in heart and brain for fear I would see in her as she developed that easy, weak nature that marked her mother.

"But she fulfilled all my hopes, justified none of my fears. She grew into the sweet little woman you see her now, affectionate and good, strong in mind and body." Martin paused a moment, then cried hotly, "Can you wonder why I felt murderous when, to gorge more money out of me, almost dry already, her father threatened to practically sell the child to that old rake, Felipe? Not only to take her away from me, but to deliberately debauch her, body and soul!

"I think I frightened him when he told me he meant to do that. Anyhow, that theft of Nix's money was his, saddled on me in order to get even. And, afterward, it must have been about the time Don Felipe took an interest in your sealskins, Nix stood in with the crowd. He knew then that I was not the thief, but kept me slaving to make the loss good, for they knew that I would never accuse Ralton, for Frances's sake.

"Oh, Ralton was a bad egg, all right! You noticed how, of a sudden, there was not so much anxiety to keep me tied to Agua Fresca? That was when Ralton and Henry, and Ryan joined company with Don Felipe to steal your skins. Rance had told them the tale, it appears, and with so much money in sight my poor contributions were of no account. Take it all round, Sturgis, I acted down there like a blazing fool. But somehow I couldn't do otherwise. Nobody could ever understand my feelings with regard to Frances. That must be my only justification for doing things which I ought to have been kicked for."

"Perhaps you wasn't such a lunatic as you make out," remarked Sturgis slowly. "Perhaps ye made a few blunders, but ye're comin' up to the top now, ain't ye? What about that scare ye had o' the sea? Was that a blunderin' pose, too? I didn't see none of it while I was with ye?"

"It was no pose Sturgis. That boat trip put the fear of death into me. I suppose I had no time to think about it while we were away. I don't feel it now, anyhow."

Sturgis pondered a while, then facing Martin with brightly glittering eyes blurted out, "Then if all's comin' well, why in the name of Noah's bandy bo'sun are ye so blamed glum? Cheer up, man! Let's go in and see Carlotta before dinner, hey?"

"You go in. I don't want to worry her again so soon. I'll wait here for you."

He relapsed into his dark meditation when left alone, and scarcely noticed Sturgis return until that harrassed mariner accosted him angrily:

"Doggone such people! You won't speak an' she won't speak, yet there's somethin' between both o' ye as wants light thrown on it. Here, get on yer hind legs and come to dinner. Perhaps a full stummick may make ye more like a human bein'."

That was a lugubrious meal. Red-faced old Sturgis plodded along through strange courses, yearning for chat, yet utterly failing to draw Martin out of his moodiness. And on Martin's side, between desultory efforts at eating, his lips moved incessantly over the inaudible words, "For Frances. She killed him for Frances. And if she choses to deny it now, who am I to judge her?" He left off eating entirely, and sat staring into vacancy while his friend drank more than his share of wine through sheer aggravation.

Then came an interruption which bade fair to throw the old fellow out of all control, much as he was longing for any sort of change to the existing doldrums. The manager of the hotel was seen speaking to a smart official-looking stranger, and presently left him and came over to the table where they sat.

"An investigation officer from Punta Arenas would like to speak to Mr. Gray," he said, and Martin sat up rigidly, staring.

"A detective?" growled Sturgis, belligerent on principle.

"If you prefer that title," smiled the manager. "Shall I tell him you will see him here, or in the lounge, perhaps?"

"Here," Martin jerked out, then a spasm

shook him. Sturgis looked on in a maze of smoldering resentment, but said nothing when the man approached, wearing the inscrutable smile of a man who sees the successful end of a pursuit in view.

"I am looking for Carlotta Montez. Matter concerning Don Felipe la Casas!" he announced. "You escorted her here, I believe."

Like a tidal wave the blood surged to Martin's brain. Through a red mist he saw as on a screen all that had followed the finding of Don Felipe's body. Again the unspoken conviction thrummed at his heart-strings, "She did it for Frances! She killed him in defense of my friend!"

Budding love he might cast from him; it seemed part of his life to suffer that much; but loyalty to a friend could never be eradicated from his being. And who better deserved his loyalty than the woman who had done murder in defense of his friend? He rose while Sturgis gaped ludicrously, and stepped away from the table, saying simply:

"You don't want Carlotta Montez. I'm your man. I killed Don Felipe!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A "SACRIFICIAL FOOL."

THE influence of that moment was felt throughout the long, wide room, even to the service doors, where a waiter whispered with a white-capped carver, and the manager stood silently by, too deeply interested himself to reprimand them. The scene at the table held all the elements of an amazing dénouement, and not the least tragic was the picture of old Captain Sturgis, staring, gaping, purple of face, slumped down in his chair as if all the vital fluid had been drained out of his body. And he felt himself unable to utter a sound, after his lips had opened once to ejaculate:

"Of all th' dumb, sacrificial fools!"

Martin waited impatiently, his eyes fixed unwinkingly on the man to whom he had surrendered himself, for it seemed an age to him since he had spoken, and no response was forthcoming. In fact, he felt a cold sensation at his heart that the man was regarding him very queerly, as if he declined to believe him or accept his surrender.

"Come, get this business over!" he snapped angrily. "Or do you intend to wait until there's a crowd of diners to witness my departure?"

And then the detective smiled, not the smile of the man-hunter in victory, but rather the warm, appreciative smile of a human being in a fresh, wholly new experience of his fellow man. His severely official face, palpably but a mask for the real man, softened and flushed, and he held out a hand to Martin, saying:

"I don't want to know your motive, Mr. Gray, but I'll say that this is the greatest thing I have ever heard of. Fortunately your sacrifice is not necessary"—Martin started, and even old Bill Sturgis sat upright again—"the murder of Don Felipe has been paid for. Ryan was hanged a week ago for that. He boasted of it while drunk, claimed he had been cheated out of some shares, and a ranch servant identified him. I don't think Miss Montez was ever thought of as an assassin—certainly you were not.

"No, sir, my errand is rather more agreeable than the taking of a murderer. My agency seeks Carlotta Montez simply because she is the beneficiary of Don Felipe's will, and since she suddenly vanished after the killing we have had to try to trace her. She is well known in Buenos Aires, but as you know, this city is no small one to comb through. That is my errand, gentlemen, and now if I may perhaps speak with the lady just one moment—"

"She is very weak and ill," said Martin, still in a daze, "but I'll ask her to receive you. Make the talk brief, please."

Martin was gone quite a while, and when he returned his face glowed with some inner emotion not to be revealed before a stranger. But when the detective had performed his own errand, and came back to them, his eyes twinkled slyly and he remarked to Martin:

"I expected to find a weak, wan, peevish invalid from what you told me. The lady seems very well along the road to perfect health to my eye. Perhaps you exercised some deep sick-room knack to pave the way

for me. Anyhow, I thank you; thank you both, gentlemen; I shall not forget this particular case and its ending in a hurry."

Left to themselves again, Sturgis peered hard at his friend and chuckled deep in his massive chest. Suddenly he slapped his knee and grinned.

"Say, old hoss, that was one time they wouldn't let ye make a fool out o' yourself, hey? You sartainly are the top-hole lummox I ever see. But say, boy, what did ye tell Carlotta to make her chirk up so quick?"

"Nothing much," returned Martin, flushing hotly. "She had told me something a while ago and I thought she was spinning a cuffer. I simply confessed to her and begged her pardon, that's all."

"Huh! Seemin'ly 'twas easy granted!" retorted Sturgis, and rose to seek his room. He paused a moment to lay his hand on Martin's shoulder. "I am leaving the ship's business to an agent to-morrow. I shall take Sandy down with me to Punta Arenas to clean up some matters there, and as soon as Carlotta is able to make the trip you can bring her and Frances down. It 'll be just as well to show them Agua Frescans you're still on deck an' not beholden to them fer a darn thing. Besides, Carlotta and Frances both have affairs to arrange. Take good care o' the ladies, old Quixote!" Then he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN HARBOR.

AGUA FRESCA was enjoying one of her rarest days, a day when a golden sun beamed out of an azure sky and made of the colorless settlement a picture of soft tones and limpid shadows, of the frozen beach a gleaming simitar of silver sand, of the black, forbidding heights of cliff and mountain benign guardians of the puny beings daring to live in their shade.

And out from the Punta Arenas trail cantered a party of pony-riders; in dress and face each member of the party formed a marked example to Agua Frescans of what might be accomplished with the human form if given the thought and care which some folks wasted on the business of others. A few old-timers stopped in their tracks to stare at the cavalcade, scarcely recognizing any of the riders; five minutes after the ponies' hoofs clattered first on the dirt of the settlement, the entire population was out in force to see the homecoming of Silent Martin and Ralton's Frances.

"Here, folks, you don't want this sort o' thing," growled old Sturgis, glowering at the gathering crowd. "I'll stay and see to the hosses, while you people walk on to Carlotta's ranch. I'll be 'out right away. Hey, scat, you!" he roared at some children who seemed to be bent on getting under the ponies' feet.

"Oh, leave them alone," smiled Martin, dismounting and turning to help Frances and Carlotta. He let his eyes rove over the crowd, but he only saw the little ones, and on them he bent a kindly look which brought back the shy smiles banished by gruff old Sturgis.

Carlotta smiled down at him sweetly as he helped her to dismount, and the children quickly detected the friendliness in her smile. When they started to walk through the street toward the ranch path, they had a slowly forming escort of tiny tads in every stage of untidiness and dirt, who only required a word from their old friend to burst into shrill cheers. But he refrained from giving that word out of regard for his companions, who, with the exception of Frances perhaps, might not care for such a welcome home.

In pairs they walked along, Carlotta with Martin, and Sandy with Frances behind. And Carlotta wore an air of pensiveness wholly new to her. Slightly thinner, and paler than of old, her loveliness was enhanced rather than marred; her long lashes swept her cheeks persistently, only raising to flash Martin a glance in response to his speech. But when those sweeping lashes rose, the great, gold-flashing eyes behind them revealed the new soul of a woman reborn.

There was nothing of brazen allure in those eyes now; the scarlet lips were slightly parted like a small rosebud moist with dew; the pearly teeth gleamed—there were all the fascinations which she had exercised in that other life she had forsaken, but

they were softened and mellowed now into a deep, absorbing yet restrained passion.

And Martin's mood matched hers. He was quieter, more chastened in spirit since that experience in Buenos Ayres. True, the experience had only been a brief and unnecessary shock, self-inflicted, but it had shown him his own heart; and that discovery resulted in a similar one on the part of Carlotta. And now, in sight of the end of all their troubles, they walked in silence, content to be near each other, finding their quiet amusement in the young couple behind them.

Frances stepped along with the air of a great lady, for the irrepressible Sandy would not permit her to forget she was one. And the lad, no longer furtive, but bold, self-assertive, letting all the world know that he was the protector of the radiant little creature at his side. Yet they were but children, and their youthful spirits would not entirely down.

This, their last week together before each took a separate direction in order to undergo a period of intensive education, which Sandy, at least, sadly needed, was not to pass in staid and solemn fashion altogether. When they reached the ranch, out of sight of the prying eyes of Agua Fresca, they meant to make up for all this state and good behavior.

But meantime, there was cooking for them a delicious tidbit of fun, presented to them right there in the street, and a gasped, half restrained cry from Frances advised the couple in front of the apparition which suddenly swept into sight from a side lane.

"Why, it's Maria Stodder!" Martin cried, and Carlotta whispered: "Let us meet her— Oh, look who's here, too!"

Phillip Henry walked into view a few paces behind Maria, and somehow he didn't look overprosperous in spite of a new suit of store hand-me-downs and varnished boots. He still wore his old Stetson hat, and his eye-glasses; and he wore, too, that old expression of having great things in mind just over the border. The party stepped over and greeted them.

"How are you, Miss Stodder?" smiled Martin, content now to sink all bygones, even with Henry.

"Mrs. Henry, Mrs. Phillip Henry, please," returned Marie loftily, with a visible sniff at Carlotta, "that Montez woman," as she used to term her. "Come here, Phillip my love," she ordered in vinegary tones. Henry moved forward to be presented with poorly concealed disgust. He declined to meet Martin's eye, and something very like a blush crept into his hardened face when Maria rattled off like a magpie: "My husband was badly treated by that Felipe—he lost a lot of money in that gold mine in them Ramireeze Islands —but we'll show 'em yet, won't we, love?— we're right on the edge of something big right now, aren't we, Phillip? My husband has to see a man next week—"

In sheer self defense Martin cut her short with a word of apology for his haste, and made their adieus before his laughter choked him. But the young folks were not so proper, or perhaps not so able to repress their feelings. As the parties separated the uncontrolled mirth of Sandy Sturgis and Frances Ralton went pealing up into that speckless azure sky, and as if in revenge the biting accents of Maria came back to them:

"Now, then, Phillip Henry, keep your place behind me and don't stand there staring like a gawk at that Montez woman!"

Phillip Henry meekly fell into his spouse's wake, and they sailed out of sight while yet the skies rang with youthful mirth.

"Poor Henry!" smiled Martin as they disappeared. "He's come into something big at last, that's a fact!"

The tale of Silent Martin really ends here. Not that he vanished out of the scene, or assumed so lowly a place that his doings are without interest; but he suddenly found amplified speech—at the ranch that evening, when Frances had taken Sandy off to show him the guanacos—and his first serious essay at making use of many words to express his thoughts resulted in a slender figure suddenly slipping within his arms, and a lovely head burying itself on his breast, while a soft, broken voice answered him:

"I cannot believe it possible that you

can forget my dark past, Martin. You say yes, and, oh, let me be content with that assurance. But if you think well enough of me to do as you promise, to adopt Frances and let her call me mother— Oh, it is too good to be true! Of course I will be your wife, Martin, and man has never been loved as I shall love you. But I won't ask for your love yet. Wait until I have proved—"

"Hush!" whispered Martin, bending his head and pressing his lips to her fragrant hair, while his strong arms quieted the quivering of her slim shoulders. "We shall prove to each other, Carlotta, and there shall be no one-sidedness to our love."

Slowly she raised her head and looked into his eyes as if in search of one last fluttering doubt. There was no doubt in that calm, strong face. Her lips sought his, and found them, found them and peace after a life of stormy passion and illicit love.

And thus bluff old Cap'n Bill Sturgis found them.

(The end.)

THE CHANGELING

SUMMER was a lady sweet,
Roses blossomed at her feet,
'Broidered was her gown of green—
Garment fitting for a queen.
Summer, with her roses red,
To another land has fled;
Huddled in a coat of gray
Sits one in her place to-day;
Drear and shivering, forlorn
As the fields of stubble corn.
Sad are we to see him here—
Autumn, beggar of the year!

Lo! He drops his mantle's fold,
Radiant gleams in cloth of gold;
Set with many a living gem
Is his kingly diadem;
In his hand he holds the keys
Of the Seasons' treasuries;
There, in full storehouses, shine
Jewels of the tree and vine;
Gold of garnered grain, the yield
Of the empty stubble-field.
Glad are we to have him here—
Autumn, rich heir of the year!

Anne McQueen.

The Luck Lizard

by *Lyon Mearson*

THE bush is like the generous mantle of night, in that it covers much that is bad and a little that is good. In baseball, out of the bush come the greatest for their little day, and into that same bush they go for the long night. The little day is of varying lengths, but it averages up about the same.

Consider, then, the case of Wally Wentworth. But no—consider first, the case of the Bears, once champions of their league but now decorating the second division. Of course, the season was barely a month old; it was not much of a jump from the second division to the first division, and no team was making a runaway race of it as yet, though the Moles, the hereditary enemies of the Bears, were topping the procession and gave fair promise of opening a much larger gap. But yet it was enough to show Bill McGuire, the manager, and the rest of the Bears that they were fallen from their high estate.

The trouble seemed to center around the position of shortstop. Terry McCann, once the best shortstop in either league, was not in his pristine state of youth—in short, he was getting old, as time is figured in baseball. He was not so fast in getting to the ball as he used to be, and, what was worse, his arm was going back on him. Sometimes these are things that are hard for the bleachers to discern at first—but they cannot be concealed from the manager and the rest of the team. Terry McCann was arching them over to first base now; he who used to whip them over on a line smoking with speed.

Instead of beating the runner to first by a step with the ball, as he used to with ease, more often than not they were beating his throw by a step. It looked very much like the veteran's last year in the big tent, unless he should be lucky enough to get a job with some major league team as coach or manager—which was quite likely, as Terry was universally liked and esteemed for his knowledge of baseball from every angle. But at present his position was a problem—and there was no utility man for the position who was worthy of stepping into his shoes, even slowed up as said shoes were.

There is no sentiment in baseball; when a man's through, why, he's just simply through, and that's all there is to it. He isn't kept on for old times' sake. The astute, grizzled manager discussed the matter gloomily with Sim Jenkinson, the veteran catcher, in the shadow of the Bears' dugout under the stands, during an afternoon when the Goliaths were administering a scientific trimming to his team.

"The whole trouble seems to be around short, Sim," he growled. "With a live man in short field, we could eat 'em up. If one of these deadhead utility men could move fast enough to git outa his own way I'd send him in—but what's the use? We'd be playin' against eleven men—the nine on the

other side, the umpire, and our own shortstop. If I had a scout who could scout out something else besides a brand-new item now and then to stick on his expense account, I'd 'a' had a new shortstop long ago."

Somberly he watched Terry picking up a grounder in his usual beautiful style, only to have the runner beat the throw by a step.

This, then, was the condition of the Bears when McGuire received a telegram from Kelly, a scout.

Found wonderful shortstop. Shall I send him on? Best regards. KELLY.

The " best regards " part of it was simply Kelly's idea of getting his money's worth out of a telegram for which he had to pay a ten-word rate anyway. McGuire was even shorter.

For Heaven's sake send him at once.
McGUIRE.

II.

WALLY WENTWORTH came three days later. He reported in the morning just before the team went out to practise. As he bulked in the doorway of the visitors' clubhouse—the Bears were playing in Cleveland at the time—he was a husky-looking specimen of young manhood. He stood an even six feet, with shoulders in proportion, and a shock of flaming red hair, superimposed over a face populous with freckles from which two eyes gleamed like two pieces of topaz, so blue were they; his mouth was curved in a ready smile as he stood there, conscious in the correctness of his garments. You know the kind of garments—probably the maker called them Kampus Kut Klothes, or some fool name like that—decorated with braid at the seams, pinch-fitting in back, with diagonal pockets.

The trousers were at high-water mark, disclosing a pair of violet socks, matched by a tie of the most ultraviolet ever before seen on land or sea. From a left-hand upper coat-pocket peeped the violet end of a violet silk handkerchief, and slung diagonally across his vest from northeast to southwest was a watch-chain of silver that might have been a cable, so thick was it. He knew he was dressed in the latest fashion, from the shaven red of his thick neck to the decorated toes of his very yellow shoes.

Terry McCann was just stepping to the door as Wally Wentworth came in.

" Hello," said Wally pleasantly.

Terry did not answer, but looked at his outfit with unconcealed interest.

" Think you'll know me next time?" asked Wally in answer to his inquiring glance.

" I'll never forget you," growled Terry. " There can't be another like that in the world." He turned to Slim Denton, his roommate, who had just come up to his elbow. " Didn't I tell you not to leave that there door open, Slim—look what blew in!"

" Well, I'm blowing in, anyway, old-timer; not blowing out of the big time, like you look ready to," smiled Wally genially. " Know who I am?"

The two shook their heads silently.

" I'm the new shortstop," he announced.

The other men in the room raised their heads in silence, inspecting him with mingled feelings.

" Shortstop of what?" demanded McCann raspingly. " If you're looking for the high school, you're three blocks out of your way—this is a big league team."

He turned away. Of course, it's not much of a welcome to give a new recruit, but McCann didn't feel any too comfortable. Remember, this was the man slated to supplant him, and although he knew he would have to go, you cannot expect a man to give three rousing cheers at his own funeral. It's just simply not being done this season, or any season.

" Huh! Guess you must be McCann," Wally hazarded shrewdly. " Well, they all get theirs, you know, old kid," he smiled brightly.

He spotted the manager, McGuire, lacing his shoes in a far corner of the room, and made his way there. He knew him, of course; his picture had been published in every paper in the country.

The others in the room regarded Wally

with a distinct distaste; his entrance had not been, strictly speaking, in the best of taste. A rookie slides into the room where the regulars are gathered in an apologetic manner; he doesn't adopt a hail-fellow-well-met attitude; he doesn't act on the assumption that they are all comrades—and, above all, he doesn't make any fresh, smart Aleck remarks. That is, every well-brought-up rookie.

Not so Wally Wentworth. He was the freshest of the fresh, and he made it evident to all concerned from the first. McGuire looked up as the young rookie stopped in front of him. He was in bad humor—in fact, he had nothing to be happy about, the way the Bears were going.

"What do you want?" growled McGuire.

"A uniform, chief—that's absolootely all," he answered brightly. "I'm the new shortstop," he announced.

"The hell you say!" muttered McGuire. "Who told you you were?"

"Kelly. Here's my contract," returned the youth, no whit abashed.

"Where do you come from?" inquired McGuire.

He knew all about it, of course, but this man jarred on his nerves somehow.

"Southern Atlantic League," replied Wally. "They say I'm good—"

"In the Southern Atlantic League," finished McGuire grimly.

"I'm good any place, an' don't let nobody tell you different," snapped back Wally.

"Never mind that guff—I'll soon know how good you are. Pick yourself a uniform outa that locker there and report on the field soon's ya git dressed."

"All right, chief, you can depend on me," came back the busher snappily.

McGuire stared, but said nothing. He was old in the game and wise in his generation; all kinds came up for inspection in the big leagues, and nothing surprised him any more.

On the field, in practise, the busher looked like a million dollars in gold. The batters did their hardest to get past him; the grounders hurtled to the short field like seventy-seven-centimeter shells richochetting over stony soil, but it seemed to make no difference to the red-haired phenom. Left side, right side, in back, in front, he gathered them all up alike in his huge red hands, throwing to first from any position with a snap and an accuracy that warmed the heart of McGuire to behold. And all the while he kept up a running fire of comment on the work of the men around him that would have led an outsider to suppose he had been working with these men for many seasons.

"Come on, snap into it!" he shouted to Truck Donath, the big first baseman, when Truck did not cover first in what he considered plenty of time to head off a swift pitch.

Truck said nothing.

"Show me how good you are!" he shouted to the batter. "Right over here—they all look alike to me." The batter obliged with a vicious grounder that most shortstops would not have touched. Wally seemed to start almost before the crack of the bat—he appeared to sense where the ball was going. With an apparently languid motion he scooped up the pellet and with the same motion, without straightening up, he shot it to first base. Not expecting such a quick return, Truck could not reach the bag in time, and the ball rolled to the stands.

"Come out of it! Come out of it, Truck!" yelped the new shortstop. "This ain't no funeral, nor you ain't the corpse, neither. Put a little pep into it."

At the bat he looked equally good.

Patten, the pitcher, had been lobbing them over to give the boys a chance to hit.

"Look who's here—Little Bright Eyes," shouted the catcher to Patten. "Where's it going to?"

"Over the right-field fence, stoopid," returned Wally. He turned to Patten. "Gimme all you got—it won't be enough." Patten cut loose with a straight one that was almost too swift to be visible to the naked eye. He grooved it over the plate. That was a mistake.

There was a sharp crack, and the white pill described a beautiful arc as it sailed swiftly and disappearingly over the right-field fence.

"Know any more jokes?" demanded the busher of Patten as he jogged back to the bench to await another turn at bat. There was no answer.

The Bears were a silent team, which is not always good for pennant aspirations. They needed a little of just this sort of pep, a little scrapping on the field, a little of the fighting spirit to carry them through a successful pennant season. But it was resented, coming from the rawest sort of a busher as it did; recruits should be seen and not heard in the presence of their elders. Anybody could have told at a glance that Wally Wentworth was not going to be popular.

His whole trouble was that he was good and he knew it—which is all right; but he intended that every one else should know it, too, from his own mouth—which is not all right.

III.

WALLY sat on the bench that afternoon throughout the game with Cleveland. But not silently—that was not his habit. All through the game, which went badly for the Bears, he enlivened the dugout and the ears of whoever would listen with his ideas on how the game should be conducted. As for the playing of Terry McCann, he was loud and persistent in his condemnation, which was neither good strategy nor good taste. But good taste and Wally Wentworth were not bosom pals—all he knew was that he was a better player than the unfortunate Terry, and he was willing to tell the world, including McGuire, the manager.

After the third Clevelander had beaten one of Terry's throws by a step, Wally moved over to the manager. McGuire was troubled, and the seat of his trousers was not getting any the best of it as he slid from place to place on the bench under the vicissitudes of the game. It was a habit of his—when things were going well for the Bears he sat silently on one spot; when things went badly, which was often these days, he slid from place to place and was given a wide berth by all who knew his characteristics. This was not a good time to come to him with advice.

Wally was not aware of this, of course. Though any other bush leaguer who was not bound around with conceit, as was Wally, would have known better than to tell McGuire, at such a moment, how to run his team.

"Say," said Wally confidentially to the manager, "that there shortstop of yours has one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel, ain't he?"

McGuire looked at him in silence, controlled himself with an effort, and continued to slide on the polished surface of the bench.

Nothing daunted, Wally continued the attack.

"Let me go in, chief," he said. "I'll show 'em something."

McGuire stopped sliding for a moment.

"Listen, kid," he growled venomously, "you're not manager of this team yet—and it 'll be two or three days before you are. In the mean time, if you don't mind, I'll try to run the outfit to the best of my ability. Get me?" he asked belligerently.

"All right, all right," replied Wally. "Don't git sore. I was just tellin' you for your own good, that's all."

"Well, for your own good, I'll tell ya to shut up," snapped McGuire, and moved away.

The next day, however, Wally went in at shortstop. McGuire did no sliding on the bench that day. The Bears won in a walk, their attack led by one Wally Wentworth, late of the bush but now decorating the big league.

Nothing went by him; he made the most difficult grounders look easy, scooping them up with a languid motion of his intelligent, capable hands that brought the old boys back to the time of Lajoie in his heyday; there was an easy grace in his snappy throw to first base that captured the bleachers from the very start; and as for speed, Truck Donath, the first baseman, testified to that by growling that he needed a catcher's mitt to hold this bird—not a thin first baseman's glove.

All in all, on that first day, when most bushers are so stagestruck that the best they can do is go "up there" and wade through the motions, Wally gathered unto

himself three put-outs, six assists, three hits —one of them a triple—and two stolen bases. He also gathered something else to himself that day, with the able assistance of Bill McGuire, the manager. It happened this way.

In the eighth inning a man was on second, with none out. Wally was at bat. McGuire signaled to him to sacrifice, in order to advance the runner to third, where he could score on an out or a long fly. Wally let one bad one and two good ones go by. The fourth one was to his liking.

There was a swift crack of his bat. Like a shell the ball shot to the right-field fence, and when it had been returned it was found that Wally was roosting on third base and the runner had scored and was assisting himself to a drink in the dugout.

McGuire's eyes grew grimmer and his mouth was set in a straight line, but he said nothing until Wally swaggered back to the bench, having scored on an infield out that would have been a sure out for nine out of ten men on third base.

"Well, chief, I suppose you see you had the wrong dope, don't you?" he smiled gaily, with an air of camaraderie. McGuire looked at him and said nothing for a moment.

"That had sacrificing beat a mile, didn't it?" Wally persisted. "It worked better."

McGuire turned full to him and looked him over from head to foot.

"My boy," he said quietly, "it worked better for the club's treasury. That's going to cost you an even fifty berries—and the next time you disregard my orders it 'll stand you a hundred. Get me?"

Wally got him.

IV.

THE public and the newspapers knew nothing of this, and Wally leaped instantaneously into stardom. His flashy, spectacular playing was the meat upon which gallery gods feed, and he made the most of it. He played to the gallery all the time; he was all over the field, not only his own short field, but he ranged into the territory covered by left field, third base, and sometimes even into short center field. He was like a flash of zigzag lightning on his feet, and the ball stuck to his hand like glue once it got there. He threw with the accuracy of a Christy Mathewson without waiting to recover his balance, and joy entered into the crabbed old soul of McGuire as he watched him cavorting around on the field.

And lucky! Combined with his fine, sparkling playing was a streak of luck a mile wide. He ran bases like a skittish colt, and when he was turned loose on the paths and started to run he usually managed to inaugurate a series of wild pitches on the part of the other team that made them look like the rawest of high-school players. Sometimes in stealing a base he would seem to sense a wild pitch, and instead of sliding in he would keep right on to the next base, trusting to luck to carry him over; and luck usually did—there was generally a wild pitch or two to help him along.

"He's a regular luck lizard, that's wot 'e is!" declared little Fitzgerald, the second baseman, a star performer himself. "Why, if luck was a drop of water, this here bird would be the Atlantic Ocean, with the Great Lakes thrown in to make it more certain."

It seemed so, too. Almost everything he started turned out all right for him—both on and off the field. One day, playing against the Moles, a short fly was hit into left field—a Texas Leaguer, a little too far for Wally to reach it ordinarily, and a little too near for Greenfield, the left fielder, to get to it. They both started at full speed, neither one hearing the shout of the other. At full speed they collided with a sickening impact.

Wally fell into a sitting posture, and the ball fell right into his lap for an out—he threw to second base and doubled up the runner there without getting up. That was all for him. But as for Greenfield, he was unconscious—and it was a week before he got back into the game.

On the field and off it he was a phonograph with an unlimited number of records and a self-starting attachment. He scrapped with everybody. He had a running line of comment that took in every occurrence on the field and every player on both teams—he did not just simply

specialize on the opposition. He was always fighting, and he made a fighting team out of the Bears.

They started by snarling at him, and wound up by snarling at their opponents, which generally makes a winning team. They played for their lives, as much to avoid the sharp tongue of Wally Wentworth as to win the game. They were at continual tension, and their clubhouse was no pleasant place to be in after the loss of a game.

And to a man they resented the airs Wally gave himself, and the assumption of fellowship with them that he labored under. A busher, even a star busher, should know his place, and Wally didn't. There was nobody to teach it to him, however.

Big Truck Donath tried once. They had lost a game, and as usual were snarling about it in the clubhouse. Wally bawled Truck out for an error he had made. One word led to another, and the upshot of it was that Truck advanced upon him with the intention of shutting his mouth once and for all. Wally stepped to one side, suddenly grown quiet, for him.

"I warn you not to try anything like that, Truck," he said soberly.

"Why not, you red-headed hick?"

"Because if you make a pass at me, you overgrown ice-wagon, I'll chase you so far you'll find a new street—that's why."

Truck made a wild swing at his head. Quick as light Wally side-stepped inside the swing. There was a dull crack—and Truck was picking himself up from the corner where he had been hurled. He made a mad rush at the recruit, swinging like a gate as he came. Only two more blows were struck—Wally's fist hit Truck, and Truck hit the floor. That's all. It took cold water to bring him to.

Nobody else ever tried anything like that on Wally again—that is, nobody on the Bears. But it did not help to increase his popularity, because big, lumbering Truck Donath was well liked, and it was not often he was moved to anger. The matter was never mentioned again between the two, but for a while there was smoldering resentment on the part of Truck that was content to watch for its chance to get even.

And in the mean time the "Standing of the Clubs" showed that the Bears were moving steadily up in the percentages. The strengthening of their only really weak spot—at short—and the addition of a fighting spirit made a team of champions out of them, and they began to move toward the top like mercury on a hot day in St. Louis. And any ball-player will tell you that St. Louis in the summer-time is the hottest place this side of purgatory—and they're not even sure that it's any hotter there.

Toward midsummer the Bears were already leading the league by a big margin, which threatened to be widened to record proportions. Wally was playing—and talking—like a fiend. Nothing could daunt him—nothing could stop his chatter. Most of his talk concerned his favorite ball-player, one Wallace Wentworth. The I's in his conversation followed each other like the telegraph poles along the track looking from the window of the Twentieth Century Limited. And during all this time his goddess Luck was with him, whether it was on the field or in a friendly—as they called it—poker game among members of the team, or in a little game of Kelly pool, or in African golf.

As an instance, there was one game in Fitzgerald's room in the hotel. It was seven-handed poker—twenty-dollar limit—and Wally was playing. They didn't like to play with him, and he knew it, but as long as there was not enough hands they could hardly bar him. Truck had been losing heavily all evening. At last he got an ace-high straight, pat.

He opened for twenty dollars. "To keep the suckers out," he said, looking at Wally significantly.

This nettled the shortstop.

"Why, I think I'll just about make that forty," Wally remarked.

Everybody else stayed out, except Fitzgerald, who had three aces, and thought it good enough to risk forty dollars on. Truck "saw" the raise. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw Wally call for two cards.

"Must have three of a kind," he thought. He shoved twenty dollars' worth of chips into the pot, which was already a

big jackpot, having gone around three or four times before.

"It 'll just cost you twenty dollars to inspect my picture-gallery," he said. Wally knew that Truck had something pretty good in his hand—he was familiar with the other's habit of playing them "close to his chest."

"Like your hand, don't you, kid?" he inquired pleasantly. "Well, I'll make it a good one—I'm gittin' up a benefit for your old age, when you retire from first basing. Raise you twenty iron boys."

Truck became very wary at this. It was altogether probable that Wally had filled in to a full house—or perhaps had caught another to his three of a kind.

"I think you're bluffing—as per usual, busher—so I'll just call." He shoved twenty dollars into the pot. "Can you beat a straight—ace high?"

"Mine are all blue," remarked Wally happily, showing a flush in hearts and commencing to rake in the pot. He had drawn two cards to fill a flush—and he had filled it! It wasn't good poker, but it was horribly good luck.

Convulsed with rage, Truck threw back his chair and jumped to his feet.

"What do you call that?" he demanded. "Poker?"

"Who, me?" Wally asked innocently. "Not at all—you kids don't know how to play poker—I call this game old maid. I've just given you a lesson for my usual fee—eighty dollars, and cheap at the price."

Dumb with anger, Truck turned and dashed from the room.

It was about the same at pool, or at dice. At Kelly pool it was common for him to "kill" a couple of men on the break and make his own ball on a fluke shot; and at dice he made twelve or fourteen straight "passes" more than once, cleaning out everybody in the game. The ordinary laws of chance seemed to be suspended in his favor, for some not understood reason.

All this made him very unpopular with his teammates. It was not that they objected to a man winning, but his personality was so unpleasant, and he won at everything so consistently that it did not seem right to them. It reacted on Wally, too. He did not have a friend on the team—no one roomed with him, and there was no man he could call pal.

He was a lonely soul, and he revenged himself by means of his biting tongue, becoming more vitriolic as time wore on. His playing, meanwhile, was more brilliant even than usual, and the gap between the Bears and the Moles, the nearest team, widened considerably. In the heart of McGuire was peace and a pleasant anticipation of a fat slice of world-series cash. He had no trouble with Wally. Only once more had the shortstop failed to follow orders.

The stern old manager instantly fined him a hundred dollars and suspended him for two days.

"An' if it happens again, kid, I'll sell you to a league so far from the majors that it 'll cost you five dollars and thirty cents to send back a postcard. An' that goes as it lays!" He spread out his hand, palm down, to indicate his feelings in the matter. Wally believed him, and did not try it again.

But feeling on the team—and on the opposing teams—ran high against Wally most of the time. Like Themistocles, he carried a dreadful thunderbolt in his tongue, and he was ready to loose it on the slightest provocation, or no provocation. His ways were an exasperation and an abomination to the men, and more than one of them would have given a goodly sum to see him come a cropper.

"If conceit was snow," declared Fitzgerald, "this bird would be a whole arctic winter." That was the consensus of opinion—and when the break came for Wally there was not a man on the team to be sorry.

V.

It arrived during a game on the home grounds of the Bears. Wally was enormously popular with the fans, perhaps on account of the very qualities deplored by the players. He played to the gallery—he took spectacular chances—he was brilliant and sparkling where other players were unimpressive—and he talked all the time, which the fans liked.

On a day when they were to play the Wolves a delegation from Wally's home town came out to see him work. It was a big day for Wally. There was a speech from the mayor of his little town at the plate, and he was presented with the traveling bag of commerce, the usual gift to a ball-player. He was even more flashy than usual in practise that day, determined to show his townspeople how good he really was.

Things went along well until the sixth inning. Wally had corraled one hit and stolen a base, besides accepting three or four chances flawlessly. In the sixth inning there were men on first and second bases when Wally advanced to the plate. He took a healthy swing at the ball, but topped it just a trifle, causing it to become a hard infield grounder, which he beat out by inches, filling the bases.

Then some devil seemed to enter into his brain—he never could explain it any other way, but the fact remained that he pulled the star bone of his generation. His town folk were on their feet, cheering him—there was a girl he knew among them, too; his head was a trifle turned. Never exactly understanding why, but perhaps it was just simply to show these people how really fast he was, he was off like a flash to second base while the pitcher held the ball.

For a time there was silent astonishment and consternation. The pitcher made no move to throw. With a grand burst of speed, Wally slid into second base with his spikes riding high amid a cloud of glorious dust. Looking up from the ground, he saw Truck Donath standing on the bag, and with the tremendous burst of laughter that arose from bleachers and grand stand, from opposing players and from his own team, he suddenly saw what he had done. He had stolen second base—with the bases full!

The pitcher, laughing so that he could hardly throw, snapped the ball to first base for an out. Shame-faced, with his head hanging, Wally started what he always declared was the longest walk of his life—the walk from second base to the bench. In the stands the fans were shrieking in their mirth—ribald, unrestrained merriment that called to the high heavens to witness that they had just gazed upon the most remarkable bonehead play in the world. On the field it was just as bad. The first baseman of the Wolves had cast aside his glove and was rolling on the ground, red in the face and unable to stop laughing. The umpires were trying hard to maintain their dignity, but it was a losing struggle.

And through it all Wally walked to the bench, a broken man, wounded in his only vulnerable part, his conceit. To have such a thing happen to him on the home grounds, and before the mayor and people of his home town—and a certain girl—why, death would have been preferable to this high-strung, self-opinionated boy. It was the heel of Achilles exposed impotently to the vulgar darts, to mix a couple of metaphors.

With a sigh of relief he sank out of view of the stands into the dugout, next to McGuire.

"I—I hope we're not keeping you up, Wentworth?" ventured the manager. A loud burst of laughter came from the rest of the team on the bench. "Or—have you already retired for the night?"

There was no answer from Wally.

The next inning the first man at bat on the Wolves looked at Wally significantly before a ball had been pitched.

"Gimme a good one," he shouted to the pitcher. "I want to hit it to short—he'll probably peg it to third to catch me when I git aroun' there."

He was almost as good as his word. He caught the first ball pitched and hit sharply to short field. It was not easy, but Wally had been accustomed to making much more difficult hits look easy. His mind in a whirl and his spirit gone, he booted the ball two or three times and when he did pick it up he threw wild to first base. When the ball got back to the infield the runner rested on second and all the infield was chattering angrily at the shortstop.

The rest of the game was like that, for Wally. He went utterly to pieces, making four errors and striking out twice of two times at bat. In silence he made his way to the clubhouse, but the rest of the team was in high glee, though the game had been

lost. At last they had something on this man—something to silence him with!

"Gentlemen," announced little Fitzgerald in the clubhouse as Wally entered, "our friend wishes to deny the report that he's dead from the neck up—it's only from the ears up!" He turned for confirmation to Wally.

For once there was no answer. Wally was cut to the raw in his pride. To be made an object of ridicule—rightfully—made him speechless with impotent rage and mortification.

The newspapers had a gay time with the occurrence, and the players, both on the Bears and over the rest of the circuit, rubbed it in unmercifully. It would have been cruel and inhuman if they had not ever before them the thought of the taunts and satire they had had to endure from Wally previously. He was never allowed to forget the matter.

His work became terrible to look at. He fumbled and booted balls that he would ordinarily have been able to field with his back turned; he made wild pitches that kept the fans in the stands behind first base dodging; and his batting fell off to practically nothing. He was a dead loss on the field, and really the only thing that saved the Bears from being submerged in the swift onrush of the Moles was the fact that they had a really large lead in the way of points.

Through all this time Wally was silent and morose—he had no come-back. Any replies he did try, and they were few, were flat and pointless, weak and stale. He had lost his "kick" entirely. He became an abolished nuisance. Life on the Bears began to swing back to its normal level.

Finally, however, the pounding of the heels of the Moles began to get loud in their ears—nearer and nearer the Moles rushed—and after a couple of weeks of this stuff McGuire began to lose his patience. He addressed the team in the clubhouse one day, just before Wally entered.

"Listen, men," he said angrily. "This bonehead stuff about Wentworth has got to stop. Even when he's rotten he's better than a lotta other men I could mention around here"—he looked around him pointedly—"and there isn't a utility man big enough to step into his place as long as he's able to stagger around in short field. Now, once and for all, get me! I want you to lay off—understand?—lay off!" He looked around in silence.

They laid off willingly enough. They had had their revenge and were willing to call bygones by their right names. But it was impossible to call off the fans and the opposing players. The fans who read this little chronicle will remember that it took Merkle ten years to live down a little misplay in 1908—and there was always some doubt as to whether it really was a misplay.

Wally's soul had been seared, and they would not let it heal. His batting average began to go down to where it would need a periscope ever to see the light again, and his fielding was a symphony in how not to do it. And the standing of the Bears got lower and lower, because this man was the keynote of the team.

Nearer and nearer crept the Moles and the end of the season. McGuire was in desperation—he slid from end to end of the bench at every game; he was sure of no game as long as Wally was playing as he was playing—and there was absolutely nobody he could put in his place.

The last series of the season was with the Moles—three games—and so close had they crept that the winner of two of the games would win the pennant and the chance for the world-series cash.

VI.

McGuire shook his head dubiously, hardly knowing what to do in the matter. The situation at short was rather serious, but he finally decided to take a chance on Wentworth. And perhaps, under the tension of the deciding games, the spell would be broken.

It was—but it was a member of the Moles who did the breaking.

Wehinger, first baseman of the Moles, cumbersome and antediluvian in his brand of humor, was responsible. He met Wally in front of the clubhouse just before the teams were to emerge to the field for prac-

tise. He addressed him pompously, holding a small paper package in his hand.

"Mr. Wentworth," he said, and Wally stopped and looked at him. Other members of both teams gathered around.

"Mr. Wentworth," he said, "on behalf of myself and my teammates, I have a small present to make to you, as a token of our appreciation for all you have done to help the Moles win this here—er—pennant." He waved grandly with his hand. Tearing the cover off the parcel, with a low bow he presented Wally with a cheap alarm-clock and a book of baseball rules.

"The rule-book is for your information on matters concerning base-running and second base, Mr. Wentworth," continued Wehinger, "and the alarm-clock to keep yer awake—"

But suddenly a wild gleam came into the eyes of Wally. He had broken through his spell. Something seemed to snap in his brain. A yell of mortification and unbridled rage split the air, and he flung himself upon Wehinger, his right and left swinging like flails. A short right caught the first baseman under the chin, and he fell, but he got up immediately and rushed at Wally.

It was a good scrap, with Wehinger getting a good beating. Seeing this, Millington, Wehinger's pal and roommate, lost his head and joined in the fight to help his friend.

There was a yell of rage from Truck Donath.

"Why, you damn coward!" he burst out. His arms swinging, he waded in to fight side by side with Wally Wentworth.

"I'm wit' ya, Wally, old boy!" shouted Truck joyfully, the light of battle gleaming in his eye.

Wally turned for a moment and saw who it was helping him—fighting shoulder to shoulder with him—calling him "old boy." A grin of appreciation came into his embattled face, and a warm feeling entered his heart. He had a pal—a friend—a comrade.

"Separate 'em from their sense, Truck, ol' Top!" he hollered deliriously, and they waded in gloriously. It was an even scrap, two to two, so the others kept their hands off; but before they were separated by the managers Wally and Truck had trimmed the other two to the queen's taste.

Wally and Truck looked at each other. A warm glow entered into them at once. Truck stuck out his hand.

"Put 'er there, Wally," he grinned. "We're friends."

They shook hands, and there were actually tears in the eyes of Wally as his teammates crowded around him and called him by his first name, shaking hands and patting him on the shoulders. They were his team-mates—his pals—they were willing to be friends. No longer would he be without an intimate—they were willing to let bygones be bygones. All rancor was gone, and they would fight side by side through these three games. There was a place for him among them.

For a moment he turned aside, and there was a tightening in his throat. Then he turned back, and Truck's arm was on his shoulder.

"Let's go out and murder the Moles, fellers," he said. "We can do it."

"Let's go!" they shouted.

And they did. Wally was his old-time self. He played the most spectacular game of his life.

The gibes were still there, of course, but they had lost their power to hurt him. He disregarded them.

"Look who's here—the bonehead of them all!" remarked the pitcher loudly at his first appearance at the plate.

"Yep, that's me!" answered Wally genially. "I'm goin' to give you a ride outa the big leagues."

The first ball pitched was to his liking, and he slammed it against the left-field fence for two bases. He stole third on the next ball pitched, and came home for the first score of the game on an easy out that would have been sure death to most runners on third base.

He played like a demon incarnate the rest of the game. Single-handed, almost, he beat the Moles; he made a home run, a double, two singles, stole two bases, and scored three runs, driving in the other two that the Bears made.

The rejuvenated Bears, driven irresistibly

forward by the playing of Wally Wentworth, won by the score of five to nothing. The second game was simply a slaughter, going to the Bears by a score of eleven to one. Wally Wentworth and the Bears had come back—and come to stay.

Wally was the outstanding star of the world series, and though the air was at times thick with the gibes concerning his bone-headedness they glided off like water from the proverbial duck's back. He had a new armor—the liking and respect of his comrades, and nobody else mattered much. He became one of the most popular players on the team among his clubmates, and though the matter of stealing second with the bases full was occasionally mentioned—it was was not safe to say anything about it to any player on the Bears without a smile on your lips.

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MIDDLE AGE

OH, Middle Age is a placid stream,
Yet a pleasant one, forsooth,
Though its quiet ways and its calm, deep bays
Seem dull to the eyes of Youth!

But when one is spent with the turbulent
Mad rush of the hurrying stream,
With the swish and swirl of the eddying whirl,
One is glad to drift and dream.

For oh, but the river of Youth runs swift,
And the river of Youth runs deep;
The current is strong as it flows along
And the rocks at its sides are steep!

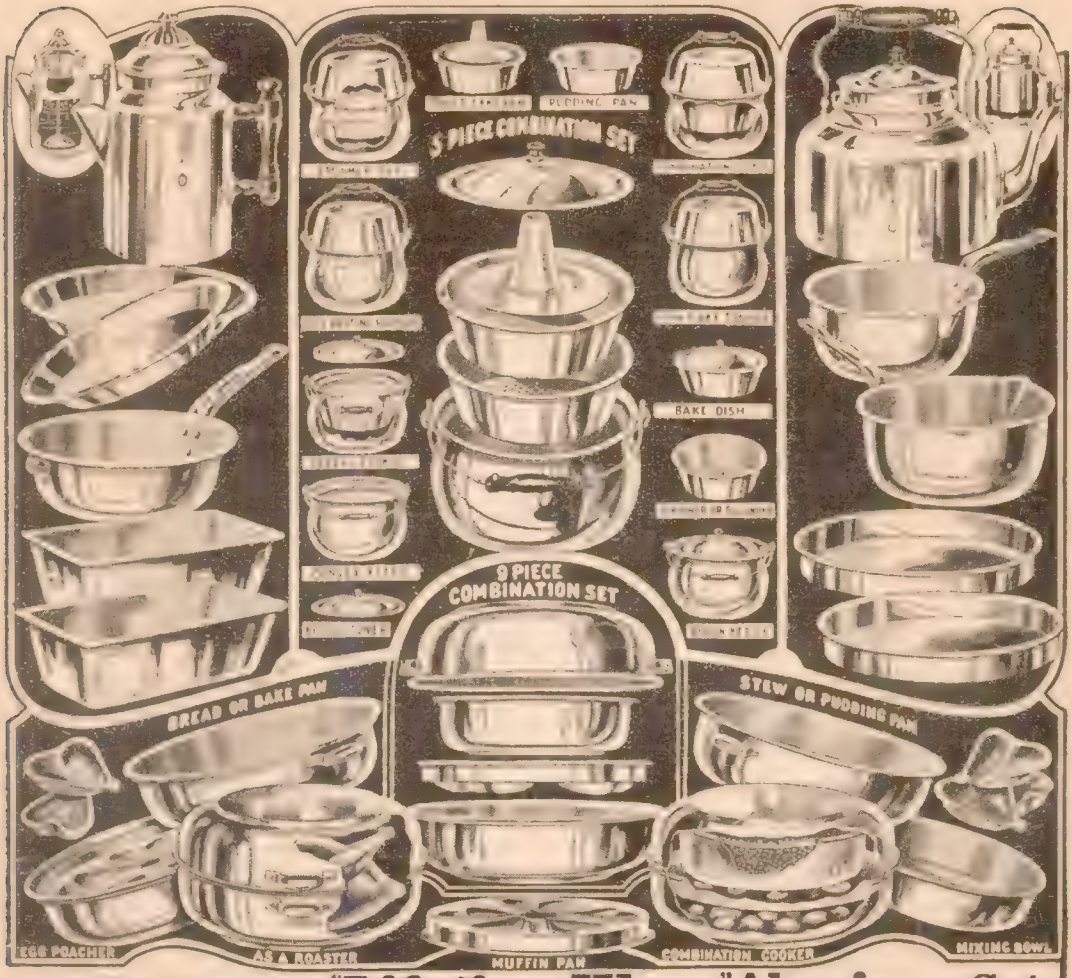
And strong be the oarsmen who keep afloat,
And many there be who drown,
For some are tossed on the rocks and lost,
And some in the deeps go down!

But slow runs the river of Middle Age,
And, oh, it is good to rest!
No more to fear that the rocks are near—
To learn that repose is best!

There are long, sweet days in the quiet bays
At the side of a well loved one—
There to gently float in a well-tried boat
Down the path of the setting sun!

Oh, the river of Youth roars loud behind—
No more does it call to me!
Here the sunset gleam in the quiet stream,
And beyond—the untried Sea!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery.



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"I said, 'Billy, I'm going to give you something worth more than a loan—some good advice—and if you'll follow it I'll let you have the hundred, too. You don't want to work for $15 a week all your life, do you?' Of course he didn't. 'Well,' I said, 'there's a way to climb out of your job to something better. Take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools in the work you want to advance in, and put in some of your evenings getting special training. The Schools will do wonders for you—I know, we've got several I. C. S. boys right here in the bank.'

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